

LOS ANGELES R.I.P.?

December 23, 1996-January 5, 1997

IN THESE TIMES

Slaves of NEW YORK



REPENT!

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50



Rudolph Giuliani is replacing
union labor with a new underclass
of welfare recipients.
Annette Fuentes reports

EDITORIAL

A HOMILY FOR THE LEFT

In the wake of President Bill Clinton's re-election, the various fragments of the American left desperately need to find a unifying voice and a shared identity. This won't be easy. Doing so will require agreement on a set of principles as well as the development of programs designed to gain popular support in future elections.

Bringing together the disparate elements of what passes for a left in this country should start with discussion of the universal principles that distinguish it from the dominant liberal-conservative consensus. This will require the subordination of attitudes and programs that are based exclusively on cultural identity, ethnicity or gender, although in developing a shared worldview these interests must be recognized and protected. In short, we have to find what the vast majority of working people in the United States have in common and identify their enemies. We must try to avoid the frequent hostility toward one another that has characterized left and liberal politics of recent decades.

We believe that a new left can be built on widespread opposition to public policy based on protecting and enhancing corporate profit. Republicans and most Democrats have adopted the corporate agenda as their own. But despite the corporate media's constant ideological barrage about the primacy of big business, most Americans reject the idea that what's good for General Motors or Boeing is good for them or for their country.

Unfortunately, most of those who consider themselves to be "the left" in this country are largely unaware of their potential allies. A case in point is the recent adoption by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of a statement on "Economic Justice for All." This document, approved at the bishops' annual conference in November, has received little attention from either the mainstream press or progressives. It is a ten-point summary, based on what one bishop called "moral principles and not the latest polls." It will be reproduced on cards and posters in English and Spanish, and be widely distributed.

The ten points include the following:

- The economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy.
- All economic life should be shaped by moral principles.

Economic institutions must be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person, support the family, serve the common good and care for the earth.

- A fundamental moral measure of any economic system is how the poor and vulnerable are faring.

- All people have a right to life and to the necessities of life (food, shelter, education, medical care and economic security).

- All people have rights to economic initiative, productive work, just wages and decent working conditions, and the right to join unions and other associations.

- In economic life, free markets have both clear advantages and limits; government has essential responsibilities and limitations; voluntary groups have irreplaceable roles, but cannot substitute for the proper working of the market and the just policies of the state.

- Society has a moral obligation, which includes taking government action when necessary, to meet basic human needs and pursue justice in economic life.

- The global economy has moral dimensions and human consequences. Decisions on investment, trade, aid and development should promote human rights, especially for the most needy.

The core idea that this statement shares with the traditional left is that protection and satisfaction of human needs should be the guiding principle of all public policy. Implicit in this is the idea that what our dominant ideologues call economic decisions cannot be separated from their social consequences. There is no such thing as a simple business decision. All "economic" decisions are also social decisions. Therefore, as the bishops suggest, the highest principles of society require social control of economic decision-making. No moral agent, and especially not the government, should set the corporate bottom line as its first priority.

Catholic bishops articulate principles around which a new left might coalesce.

Of course, the enunciation of these principles alone does not a left make. They need to be interpreted and applied to public policy. Nor, to put it mildly, is it likely that all sectors of the Catholic Church will unite behind this project. Still, no force in our country even remotely approaching the authority of the church has articulated these principles. The only actor on the political scene today giving thought to these principles is the New Party, which has begun to apply them to specific public policy issues. That is the essential next step in constructing a left capable of challenging the entrenched power of the corporate elite.

IN THESE TIMES
 "...with liberty and justice for all"

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In These Times (ISSN 0160-5992) is published biweekly by the Institute for Public Affairs, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. Subscriptions are \$36.95 a year (\$59 for institutions; \$61.95 Canada; \$75.95 overseas). Second-class postage paid at Chicago, IL and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *In These Times*, 308 E. Hitt St., Mt. Morris, IL 61054. This issue (Vol. 21, No. 3) published Dec. 23, 1996 for newsstand sales Dec. 23, 1996-Jan. 5, 1997. (312) 772-0100. Member: Alternative Press Syndicate. The entire contents of *In These Times* are copyright © 1996 by the Institute for Public Affairs, and may not be reproduced in any manner, either in whole or in part, without permission of the publisher. Copies of *In These Times'* contract with the National Writers Union are available upon request. Complete issues and volumes of *In These Times* are available from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI. All rights reserved. *In These Times* is indexed in both the Alternative Press Index and the Left Index. Publisher does not assume liability for unsolicited manuscripts or material. Manuscripts or material unaccompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope will not be returned. All correspondence should be sent to: *In These Times*, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. E-mail: itt@igc.apc.org. For customer service and to place subscription orders, call toll free: (800) 827-0270. Advertising rates sent on request. Available back issues are \$5 each; specify volume and number. All letters received by *In These Times* become property of the newspaper. We reserve the right to print letters in condensed form.



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LETTERS

Defending Cuban intellectuals

In "Intellectuals under fire" (September 16), Carollee Bengelsdorf offers an often insightful commentary on the state of Cuban academics. However, I believe she is off-base in her discussion of Herberto Padilla, the Cuban poet whose 1971 denunciation caused a furor of protest from European and Latin American "leftist" intellectuals in Europe.

Bengelsdorf argues that an ideological hardening of the Cuban Culture Ministry in the late '60s and early '70s caused many Cuban intellectuals to "withdraw from public life," others to emigrate, and some to "throw each other to the dogs." She concludes that Cuban film was the only medium to maintain "work of intellectual merit." Besides the problem

with such a subjective statement, especially coming from a North American academic, it is blatantly untrue. One hopes that Bengelsdorf is familiar with "Caliban," the seminal essay by José Fernández Retamar written in direct response to the European criticisms and published in the September-October 1971 issue of the journal *Casa de las Américas*. The essay—in which Retamar takes up *The Tempest* as a metaphor for the Caribbean, claiming the "primitive" Caliban as Latin America's true identity—is not only a touchstone in the ascension of Latin American Studies, but for literary and cultural studies as well.

I respect Bengelsdorf's concern for the intellectual veracity of the Cuban revolution. Inaccurate and misleading reports, however, are plentiful enough from the U.S. government and the small but rabid right wing in Miami. Perhaps Bengelsdorf needs not only to revisit Cuban scholarship

but also to re-examine the sinister "Track Two" policies she so easily dismisses.

John Bracken
San Diego, Calif.

Lay off Paul

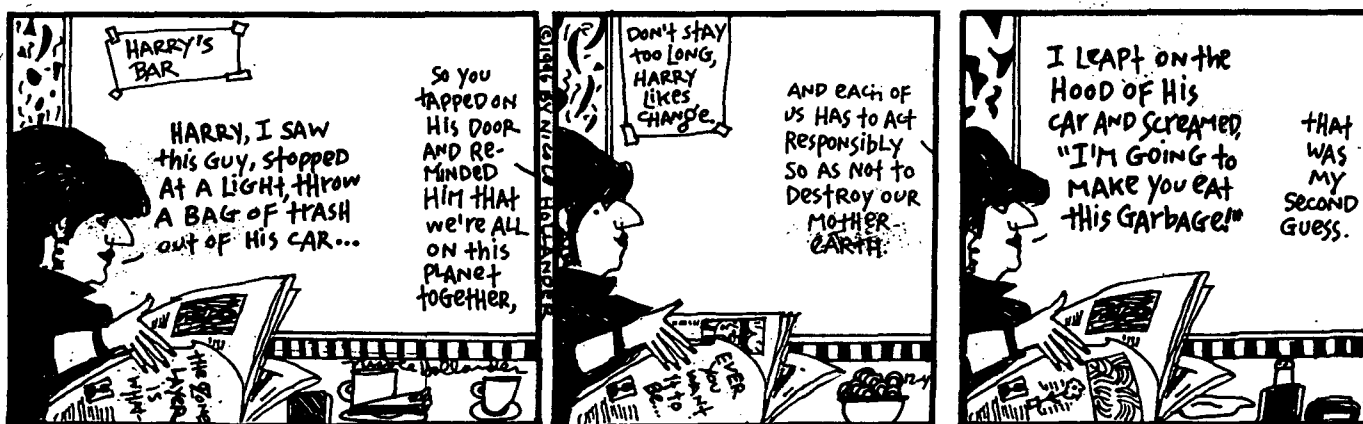
If the purpose of progressive journalism is simply to attack liberals who stray from the left's ideological principles, then Monika Bauerlein's coverage of Sen. Paul Wellstone's campaign ("A cookie-cutter campaign," October 28) has been effective. If, however, the "left" media seeks also to advance liberal causes, Bauerlein has failed. Bauerlein describes Wellstone as a "feisty" Democrat, but he is much more than that. He is a courageous politician who consistently votes left on the key issues. His positions are not popular, even within his own party, but they are honorable.

I support *In These Times* and other progressive magazines because I want a viewpoint that is absent in the mainstream media. I also support progressive candidates because I want the liberal agenda to be written in the law, not just in print. But no politician can write socially responsible legislation if he or she is not first elected to office.

According to Bauerlein, Paul Wellstone's sin is his determination to be elected. *ITT* says it supports progressive legislation, but it criti-

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



cizes one of the few honest liberals in the Senate. Such a purist left ideology can only be maintained, unfortunately, at the expense of the progressive movement.

Stephen Fein
Mill Valley, Calif.

Resistance is futile

I usually find the environmental reporting by Joel Bleifuss to be of high quality and very informative; however, in his report "Recipe for disaster" (November 11), he made at least one error that detracts from and confuses the very important issue that he wishes to discuss—bio-engineered crops. The issue of ampicillin resistance genes added to corn plants is not well presented. Ampicillin resistance genes are commonly found in bacteria. Their spread (along with numerous other antibiotic resistance genes) to a wide variety of pathogenic bacteria has led to the troubling post-antibiotic medical situation now emerging.

Despite the medical implications, Ciba-Geigy is correct to state that the ampicillin resistance gene "serves no purpose other than as a handy marker for scientists to determine which plants have the added genes." Bleifuss' fears that ampicillin resistance will be passed to cattle and people who eat the corn, resulting in cattle and people becoming resistant to ampicillin, are garbled to say the least. *All* organisms other than wall-containing bacteria are resistant to ampicillin. Ampicillin interferes specifically with bacterial wall biosynthesis. Bacterial cell walls are molecules unique to bacteria. Penicillin antibiotics are true wonder drugs because of their absolute specificity for bacteria.

The problem with genetically engineering plants containing these antibiotic resistance gene markers is that there is a significant chance that addi-



tional bacteria will acquire these genes (by various natural gene-transfer mechanisms) and further spread them throughout the bacterial domain of life. (The counterargument is that these resistance genes are already ubiquitous among bacteria.) Further, the indiscriminate use of antibiotics in animal feed has selected for multiple antibiotic resistant strains of pathogenic bacteria. This latter point has been discussed widely among microbiologists. It is not the presence of antibiotic resistance genes in bacteria that is the problem (they evolved prior to the use of antibiotics in medicine); rather, it is that antibiotics are so often misused that we have selected for multiple antibiotic resistant bacteria that are virtually impossible to kill by antibiotic treatment.

David R. Nelson
Professor of Microbiology
University of Rhode Island
Kingston, R.I.

The politics of transit

Linda Baker ("End of the line," November 25) oversimplifies the facts and the reason that voters in all of Clark County, Wash.—not just Vancouver—defeated the light-rail project in February 1995. Indeed,

had the vote been only in Vancouver, it probably would have passed, despite a rushed campaign, an uncertain route and a river crossing made of vaporware. There is good reason to think that the vote was more anti-politician than anti-transit.

John Bear
Vancouver, Wash.

Author's query

Authors seek grass-roots accounts of former Sen. George McGovern's 1972 presidential campaign. We are looking for stories of those active in the McGovern campaign at the ground level that highlight the multi-dimensional quality of that political effort. Proposals, ideas and suggestions for other places to publish this query are welcome. Please contact Walter Gruenzweig by e-mail at GRUENZWE@mail.fb15.uni-dortmund.de, or write to him at Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, FB 15, Universität Dortmund, D-44221 Dortmund, Germany.

Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you wished to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

INSHORT

malaise at home.

Today the situation is different. The dream of a Greater Serbia has turned into a daily nightmare, and the last pretense of democracy has proved a farce. In late November, after Serbia's Electoral Commission annulled the local election results in a number of constituencies where opposition candidates won, tens of thousands of Serbs took to the streets. The Zajedno coalition, which consists of the Serbian Renewal Movement, the Democratic Party and the Civic Alliance, called for a "network of free cities as an alternative to the rest of undemocratic Serbia."

The protesters marching in Serbia's cities are unified in their opposition to Milosevic, but the similarities end there. In fact, there are two simultaneous demonstrations going on in Belgrade: one led by the Zajedno coalition, another organized by university students. According to Sasa Nikolic, a student at Belgrade University who has regularly turned out for street demonstrations, Zajedno and the students have different agendas: Whereas the political opposition parties of Zajedno have made "concrete" demands, such as recognition of local election results, students have called for more "abstract" reforms, such as the rule of law and an independent judiciary. Meanwhile, blue-collar workers have remained largely aloof, mis-

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Milosevic agonistes

President Slobodan Milosevic's headaches are getting worse. For more than two weeks, Serbia's strongman has had to deal with the largest opposition protests of his seven-year pseudo-democratic rule.

The last time this sort of thing happened, in March 1991, the pugnacious Serbian leader dispersed student protesters in Belgrade with police and tanks. At the same time, he continued to fuel ever-rising nationalist passions. The war in Croatia—and later in Bosnia—was a welcome distraction from the

trustful of "liberal" protests, and willing—with a few exceptions—to throw in their lot with Milosevic.

In a sense, the opposition's broad public support has less to do with grass-roots democracy than with the popular sentiment that Milosevic betrayed fellow Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia by signing the Dayton agreement. According to Obrad Savic, a leading Belgrade intellectual, the students support Zajedno in demanding fair elections but "don't want to become instruments of the opposition."

Both students and Zajedno are infected with the nationalist virus, Savic adds. Until recently, Zoran Djindjic, the leader of the Democratic Party, maintained relations with the disgraced Bosnian Serb firebrand and indicted war crim-

inal Radovan Karadzic. Vuk Draskovic, a Communist-era dissident and the head of the Serbian Renewal Movement, has similarly exploited nationalist themes.

Non-nationalist democrats have failed to show strongly in any election. The newly founded Social Democratic Union, which calls for the establishment of a civil society along western European lines, broke from the center-left Civic Alliance when the latter threw in its lot with Zajedno.

Regardless of their motivations, tens of thousands of Serbs are marching daily against Milosevic's regime. The beleaguered president has responded by mobilizing his powerful police apparatus. The U.S. threat to re-impose an embargo if he resorts to violence is toothless, since Congress has already extended trade sanctions against Serbia until next year. Moreover, the Serbian president is calculating that the West still regards him as a guarantor of the fragile Dayton peace.

But isolated internationally as well as domestically, Milosevic is concerned with survival. His opportunistic political course has gained him a host of enemies, from Serbs living in Bosnia and Croatia to ethnic Albanians within rump Yugoslavia's borders. Acquiescence to the protesters' demands would discredit his corrupt government, while a violent crackdown could re-ignite the Balkan powder keg.

—Lucian Kim

A test case for the Anti-Terrorism Act?

On October 28, Imad Hamad received a deportation order from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Although he has lived in the United States for 16 years, is married to an American citizen and has two small children who are American citizens, Hamad was instructed to leave the country by December 15 or face prison.

Observers consider Hamad the first to face deportation under the Anti-Terrorism Act, which President Clinton signed into law last April, one year after the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City. The law empowers the government to deport immigrants who aid organizations the State Department designates as "terrorist." Even individuals who support only legal activities—for instance, by sending medicine to a Hamas-run hospital—are liable to be deported under the act.

Hamad is accused of no crime, but in the October 28 letter, the INS alleges "active participation and membership in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine," a faction of the PLO. In 1982, Hamad took part in protests against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and was arrested along with many others at a San Francisco sit-in protesting the invasion. A district court promptly dismissed the charges. Hamad admits he was active in the General Union of Palestinian Students, which supported the PLO, but says he had

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APPALL-O-METER

THE IN THESE TIMES INDEX OF INDECENCIES



By David Futrelle

Don't worry, be happy 4.3

Major bummer! A startling investigative report in *Rolling Stone* reveals that cover-boy Eddie Vedder, lead singer of Pearl Jam and outspoken Gen-X tortured soul, was actually ... a happy, popular and altogether well-adjusted kid back in high school. So why does he pretend he was so miserable? "I don't think it means he's being untruthful," a friend of The Artist Formerly Known as Little Eddie Mueller tells *RS*. "I just think people don't understand that you don't have to be this miserable character in real life. I feel it's an art, an ability to be the character who sings these tortured songs."



Iced! 8.0

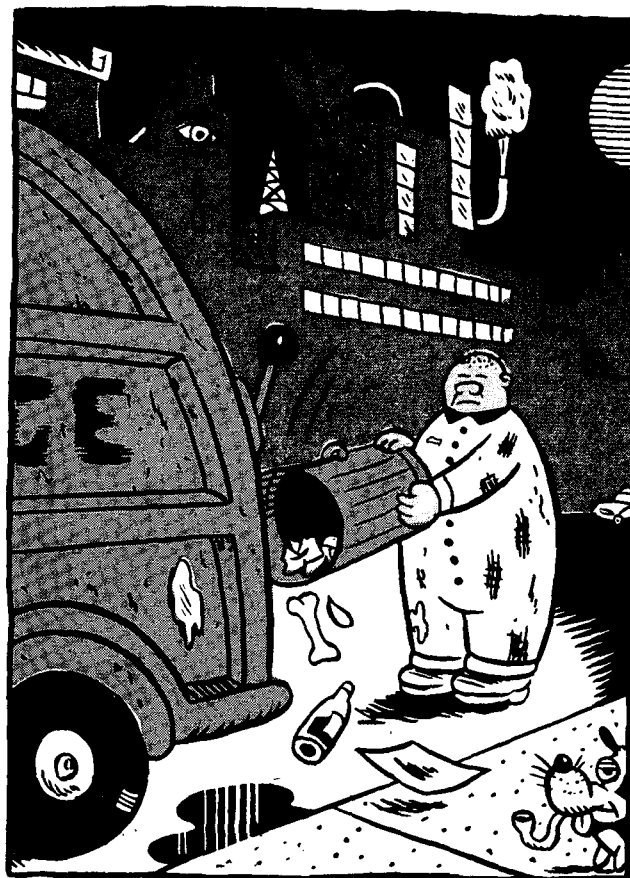
Those optimistic that future inhabitants of this earth will have nothing better to do than unfreeze and resuscitate random dead bodies may wish to speak to the good folks at the Alcor Life Extension Foundation, who, for a mere \$120,000 will put you on ice after you die. But, as the *New York Observer* reports, it's much cheaper if you just freeze the head, and the Alcor folks will be happy to lop it off for you. "Actually, we think of it as removing the body," the Alcor literature explains. "Since evolution and genetic technology have failed to come up with neck zippers, pop tops, or screw-off heads, we have to use a scalpel and surgical saw." Worried about the safety of the operation? No problem—difficult medical procedures at Alcor are performed by a trained, er, veterinarian.

SWM, likes long walks, conspiracy theory and Ayn Rand. 8.1

Conservative and lonely? It's not your fault—blame the liberals! An ad for *Conservatively Single*, a lonely-hearts rag for lovers of Newt, claims that many conservatives "refuse to place personal ads because of the liberal bias of singles magazines." Well, now they have an option. "Conservatives are decent, hardworking people," the ad explains. "Even though some may be single, they have strong family values. You won't find such a high-calibre single in the nightclubs or bars." Though you might find some out training with the Militia of Montana.

No assault rifles, please. We're Democrats. 12

Political power, Mao once said, flows from the barrel of a gun. In this case, a shotgun. This coming January, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee is holding something called the "Chairman's Council Eastern Shore Duck Hunt with the Hon. John D. Dingell in Dorchester County, Maryland," offering big-money contributors the chance to wade around in the muck with the congressional muckity-muck. Guests are requested to specify what kind of shotgun they are bringing, or if they "need to borrow a shotgun." Given the amount of the requested donations—from \$2,500 individual to \$6,000 corporate—you'd think the donors could splurge and buy guns themselves.



Continued from page 7

no involvement in the PFLP.

Even if the INS' allegation is true, says Professor David Cole of Georgetown University, Hamad "has a First Amendment right to be a member of the PFLP." Cole represents the "L.A. Eight," eight pro-Palestinian advocates accused of membership in a "terrorist organization." Their case, which is still in progress, established that even non-citizens have free speech rights.

Despite references to Hamad's alleged political ties in the deportation order, INS spokesman Russ Bergeron told the *Detroit Free Press* that "the decision has nothing to do with the new Anti-Terrorism Act." The INS says Hamad is being deported because he overstayed his visa.

But shortly before he received the deportation order, says Hamad, an INS official told his lawyer, Noel Saleh, that his case "falls under the new terrorism law." Saleh adds: "I can cite dozens of people who've had [visa] violations much worse than his. This has everything to do with the Anti-Terrorism Act." The INS may be wary of explicitly invoking the Anti-Terrorism Act because they don't want it to be challenged in court at this point.

Hamad says that the INS has singled him out for years, obstructing his attempts to get a green card and become a citizen. When he inquired about delays, he says, INS officials told him his files were "misplaced" or that his applications were "misdirected." The INS has also refused to renew Hamad's work permit, and, since his wife was recently disabled in a car accident, his family faces financial disaster.

Whether Hamad's case or another, legal scholars say, the first serious attempt to enforce the Anti-Terrorism Act will set the stage for a major legal battle. The stakes will be as high for citizens as they are for resident aliens, since the act also allows the government to imprison U.S. citizens who support "terrorist" groups and, for the first time, allows prosecutors to use secret evidence in U.S. courts. "This is not just about immigration," Hamad warns. "This is about the Constitution."

—Sam Hussein



Coughin' nails

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN EIGHT YEARS, MISS KENTUCKY declined to serve as her state's honorary chair of the Great American Smokeout, the American Cancer Society's annual anti-smoking drive. The reigning beauty queen, Veronica Marie Duka, 19, had other obligations, namely a contract with the state's Agriculture Department to tour 130 schools and promote the state law against selling tobacco to minors. But as Duka told the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, state officials "don't want me to talk about anti-smoking. That's not my mission." As her \$20,000-a-year contract spells out, her mission is strictly to talk about the state law. "It is not against the law to have tobacco on you, but it is against the law to try to get it," Duka explained to students at Letcher High School in Letcher, Ky. She went on to elaborate: "I work for the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, which means they make money when people smoke. They don't want people to stop smoking." —Joel Bleifuss

The Devil recycles

DAVID GELERTNER, ART CRITIC FOR THE WEEKLY STANDARD, BELIEVES THAT ENVIRONMENTALISM IS AN ABOMINATION IN the eyes of the Lord. Moreover, he writes, the right has failed in its duty to extirpate this heresy root and branch. Instead, conservatives complain about "costs, growth and property rights." Gelernter continues:

When my sons come home from school singing recycling songs they learned from a "folk singer" at school assembly, when their teachers present recycling not as a policy proposition but a matter of right and wrong, the handwriting is on the wall. ... Environmentalism is no good as a state religion: it is watered-down paganism and paganism is evil. Environmentalism started as a noble cause, but a few or Christian today has a moral obligation not just to disapprove of it but to fight it.

For those interested in further enlightenment, Gelernter's full thesis is laid out in the November 17 issue of the learned *Washington Post*. —J.B.



Digital TV standards and the public interest

Couch potatoes may be pardoned for a lack of gratitude this past Thanksgiving, when it was announced that broadcast and computer industry honchos had finally come to an agreement about standards for digital—or, as it once was known, “high definition”—television. After all, in how much greater definition does one need to experience Jay Leno’s chin, Ricki’s hairdo or the antics of *Friends*?

More is at stake than pretty pictures, however, and there are even reasons to be, if not grateful, at least mildly upbeat.

The first is that the standards accord could have been much worse. Broadcasters and TV manufacturers wanted the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to use the traditional standard for how broadcasters display images on a TV screen. Computer folks wanted digital TV sets to be able to transmit computer-generated images as well, but computers display images differently. For years, it seemed like the broadcasters—longtime pros at lobbying and all-around political influence—would get what they wanted, effectively blocking competitors. But after FCC head Reed Hundt made it

clear that the commission would only consider a negotiated settlement, the two industries finally agreed to disagree. The FCC is basically going to let the market decide.

“This is good news,” said Andrew Blau of the Benton Foundation, a foundation that encourages nonprofit uses of new communications technologies. “Someday consumers will only need one piece of equipment, instead of having to turn from their TV to their computer screen when they want to look at their bank statement or e-mail grandma or do their homework.” Blau assumes, as does just about everybody in the industry now, that digital TV will perform a range of digital services we’ve begun to take for granted: telecommuting, automated energy conservation, burglar alarms, Web crawling.

Of course, consumers will have to buy new TV sets, and it will take a few years for them to come down in price. But people have made the switch before, in the 14 years it took to make color TV the norm.

Now that digital TV has cleared the standards hurdle, much larger decisions can be made. Most important is the question of the spectrum, or section of the airwaves, on which digital signals will ride. The FCC tells all users which part of the spectrum—which is a public resource—they can use for what purpose, and it charges users, either in cash or in kind, on behalf of the public. The FCC has long promised broadcasters a second swatch of spectrum on which to transmit digital images, so they can keep broadcasting ana-

log signals on their old spectrum while today’s TV sets are still out there. But the agency has never made clear what broadcasters have to do for the public in return for the lucrative inside track on the digital TV era.

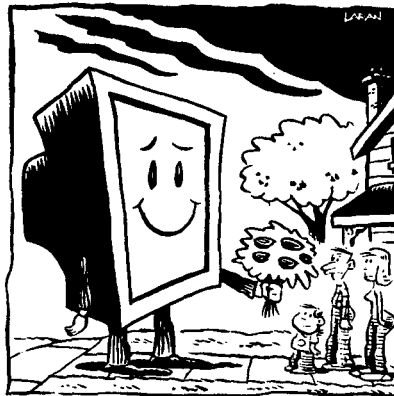
After long treating spectrum as a gift that goes on giving, the government may finally make broadcasters give back a little something. “The issue once was something for the public or nothing,” says Andrew Jay Schwartzman of the veteran public interest legal firm Media Access Project. “Now it’s more like, should it be money or services?” If the government decides it wants money, it will likely hold spectrum auctions—something that makes politically influential broadcasters wince.

As for services, there are plenty of ways broadcasters might serve the public, as FCC head Hundt pointed out in a recent speech: guaranteed free (non-subscription) channels; free electoral time to assist campaign finance reform; kids’ educational shows; transmission of noncommercial channels like C-SPAN; neutral but informative coding of programming so that families can make up their own ratings systems.

In the ‘60s and ‘70s, a rough public interest standard had emerged for old-fashioned TV. In addition to their commercial fare, broadcasters offered news, public affairs, fair treatment of controversial and electoral issues, children’s shows and community programming. But as Hundt grimly noted, the Reaganites killed all that with a deregulatory zeal that also destroyed accountability. He argued that it was time to establish, once again, a public interest standard for broadcasters.

Just what that standard should be—video soapboxes? free electoral time for all candidates? community volunteer group shows? lifelong education programs?—is, until January 10, an open question at the FCC, through a docket known as MM87-268. The FCC accepts e-mail on the issue at dtvalotment@fcc.gov. The Benton Foundation (www.benton.org and (202)638-5770), among other public interest organizations, is encouraging the debate about what the public gets out of digital TV.

—Pat Aufderheide



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Colombia's war on the poor

Gloria Cuartos, the embattled, young mayor of Apartado, Colombia, has had many bad days, but August 21 was the worst. “I was in a primary school with children talking about conflict resolution,” she said. “Two men stopped outside the gates. They grabbed a child and beat him and cut his throat and threw the head of the child towards

where we were standing." In the ensuing chaos, gunfire broke out between members of the paramilitary group that committed the violence, anti-government guerrillas and the police. A 12-year-old girl helped the mayor hide under a bed in a nearby house.

Cuartos—who recently won a UNESCO award and was named 1996 Colombian Woman of the Year—is being targeted because of her outspoken opposition to violence and her condemnation of all armed groups. Since her term began a year and a half ago, seven municipal employees and two city council members have been killed by paramilitary death squads. On November 25, a delegation of American women answered Cuartos' call for solidarity and traveled to Apartado for a United Nations Day of Non-Violence Towards Women. The night before, a city bus driver was found slain on the outskirts of the city.

Apartado is a regional center with a population of 100,000 in the Urabá area of northwestern Colombia. Urabá's land is rich, and with shorelines on both the Pacific and Caribbean and a border with Panama, the province is strategically located. In addition to its \$400 million banana industry, local politicians have talked of building a trans-oceanic "land canal" and new links in the Pan-American highway in the region.

Coca is not grown in Urabá, but the region has become a transit hub for illegal guns and drugs. Legal and illegal economic interests are at the root of a vicious paramilitary campaign to wipe out the guerrilla presence, real or perceived, in the entire region. But the covert goal is much broader: to push the peasants off the land and to establish secure landowner control throughout the region. Reportedly, cattle ranchers and banana plantation owners fund these death squads, under the direction of local landowner Fidel Castaño. Cuartos believes that land speculators, with money from drug trafficking, are buying up the best land in Urabá and displacing peasants in the expectation of neoliberal development.

The Colombian army—led by commanders trained at the School of the Americas (see "Torture 101," October 14)—does nothing. In October, Amnesty International USA announced at a press conference on human rights violations in Colombia that almost every Colombian military unit suspected of murdering civilians was in fact receiving arms and other equipment from the

United States. Critics charge that money the United States is sending the Colombian army for the drug war instead is being spent on the dirty war against the country's poor. The Clinton administration denies a relationship between the army and the paramilitaries, but it's obvious to virtually all Colombia observers that they are closely connected. No armed encounter between the army and paramilitary units has ever been reported.

Mayor Cuartos criticizes the Colombian government for refusing to stop the violence in Apartado. "I believe that the money the United States is sending to stop the drug war is coming to Urabá and is not being used to protect citizens," she says. "We need international support. There should be international pressure so that public security forces throughout Colombia respect the rights of our citizens."

—Robin Lloyd

For more information, write the Colombia Support Network at P.O. Box 1505, Madison, WI 53701.

Sources

Lucian Kim is a freelance reporter based in Berlin.

Sam Hussein is a consultant to the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

Robin Lloyd is publisher of *Toward Freedom*, in Burlington, Vt.

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

By Peter Hannan



THE FIRST STONE

PARTNERS IN CRIME

By Joel Bleifuss

On November 26, contra leader Adolfo Calero went before the Senate intelligence committee to deny any CIA complicity or contra involvement in cocaine trafficking. The allegations, said Calero, were "crap." His testimony—given in hearings called to investigate CIA involvement in the drug trade—was relayed to the nation by reporters from the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.

Editors at those news organizations, however, did not see fit to send reporters to cover other Capitol Hill testimony on the CIA presented that same day. At the other event, former Senate investigator Jack Blum described Calero's work in the mid-'80s lobbying Congress and the American people on behalf of the contra cause. At the time, no one knew that the CIA employed Calero. By paying him to press the flesh on Capitol Hill, the CIA violated federal law that prohibits it from interfering in domestic political affairs. "That is about as dangerous to the Constitution as it can get," said Blum.

Blum spoke at "Drugs, Impunity and the CIA," one of a series of seminars sponsored by the Intelligence Reform Project of the Center for International Policy, an organization headed by former U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador Robert White. The following report is based on transcripts of the discussions at the seminar.

Melvin Goodman, former division chief at the CIA's Soviet Affairs office, moderated the seminar. He opened the program by noting that a Miami grand jury had just indicted Ramón Guillen, a former general in Venezuela, on charges of smuggling cocaine into the United States. Guillen had headed a special CIA-financed Venezuelan National Guard anti-narcotics unit.

The Venezuelan connection is just the most recent example of how the CIA has allied itself with drug dealers in order to further its policy goals. Such relationships date back to 1948, when the CIA removed socialists from the

leadership of a Marseilles union and replaced them with Corsican drug dealers.

Another seminar participant, Alfred McCoy, author of *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Drug Trade*, set the historical stage:

Surveying the steady increase in America's drug problem since the end of World War II, I can discern periodic increases in drug supply that coincide—rather approximately—with covert operations in the drug zones. ... In one of history's accidents, the Iron Curtain fell along an Asian opium zone that stretched for 5,000 miles from Turkey to Thailand—making these rugged highlands a key front of Cold War confrontation. As the CIA and allied agencies mounted operations in the opium zone during the 40

years of Cold War, they found that ethnic warlords were its most effective covert-action assets. These leaders exploited the CIA alliance to become drug lords, expanding opium production and exporting refined heroin. The agency tolerated such trafficking and, when necessary, blocked investigations. Since ruthless drug lords made effective anti-communists and heroin profits amplified their power, CIA agents did not tamper with the requisites of success.

That policy continued through the Vietnam War, according to McCoy, when the CIA refused to interfere with the activities of a key U.S. ally in Laos, Hmong drug lord and general Vang Pao. "The CIA's policy of tolerance towards its Laotian allies did not change even when they began producing heroin to supply U.S. combat forces fighting in South Vietnam," said McCoy. Indeed, according to a 1974 White House report, by 1971, 34 percent of U.S. troops in Vietnam were addicted to heroin. As a 1972 secret report compiled by the CIA's inspector general, put it: "The past involvement of many of these Laotian officers in drugs is well known, yet their good will ... considerably facilitates the military activities of agency-supported irregulars. ... The war has clearly been our overriding priority in Southeast Asia and all other issues have taken second place. It would be foolish to deny this, and we see no reason to do so."

Having learned its lesson in Vietnam, the United States stopped sending its own troops to the Third World and began fighting the Cold War with proxy armies.

In 1979, the United States, via the CIA, countered the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan by covertly arming the "Afghan freedom fighters," including the soldiers of the Islamic right who currently control Kabul. "As they gained control over liberated zones inside Afghanistan, the Afghan guerrillas required that their supporters grow opium to support the resistance," said McCoy. Protected by both the CIA and the Pakistani intelligence service, the Pakistani military

and Afghan resistance set up labs along the border to turn opium into heroin. McCoy explained that in 1975, neither Pakistan nor Afghanistan produced heroin, but by 1981 Pakistan had become the world's largest producer.

As in Southeast Asia, agency officials acknowledged that they looked the other way. "Our main mission was to do as much damage as possible to the Soviets. We didn't really have the resources or the time to devote to an investigation of the drug trade," said Charles Cogan, the former CIA officer who directed the multi-billion dollar Afghan operation, in an Australian television interview. "I don't think that we need to apologize for this. Every situation has its fallout. ... There was fallout in term of drugs, yes. But the main objective was accomplished. The Soviets left Afghanistan."

The same kind of calculation was made in Central America, where a 1989 Senate foreign relations subcommittee chaired by Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) documented that four of the contra-connected companies hired by the State Department to provide humanitarian relief to the contras were also smuggling cocaine into the United States. "The Kerry committee," said McCoy, "established a pattern of CIA complicity in Central America strikingly similar to the one seen in Laos and Afghanistan—tolerance for drug dealing by its assets and concealment to protect its larger covert operation."

Jonathan Kwitny, a former *Wall Street Journal* reporter and author of *The Crimes of Patriots: The True Tale of Dope, Dirty Money and the CIA*, presented at the seminar documents—including refueling slips from military airstrips, bills of sale for airplanes and White House memos—that connect the contras with drug trafficking.

In an April 9, 1985 memo to Oliver North, North's faithful aide Robert Owen wrote that Calero had appointed Fernando "El Negro" Chamorro to head up the contra army's southern command. Chamorro is a "concern," wrote Owen, because he is surrounded by people who are "in the war not only to fight but to make money." These lieutenants included Sebastian González, who, Owen wrote, is "now involved in drug running out of Panama," and José Robelo who has "potential involvement with drug running."

The role of the CIA in the drug trade has got an unusual amount of attention recently, most importantly in an investigative series in the *San Jose Mercury News* which argued that CIA-sponsored contra operatives played a role in creating the Los Angeles crack epidemic. CIA Director John Deutch, in an attempt at damage control, has issued carefully crafted denials. On November 15, Deutch told a gathering of angry residents in South-Central Los Angeles: "As of today, we have no evidence of a conspiracy by the CIA to engage in encouraging drug traffickers in Nicaragua or elsewhere in Latin America—during this or any other period." But the issue is not a CIA "conspiracy," but rather that the

agency was aware of the trafficking and did nothing to stop it. Deutch has promised an investigation.

What will the scope of that investigation be? "If the CIA review concentrates exclusively on the Los Angeles connection, I have little doubt that the CIA will be found innocent," said former Ambassador White in an October address to the National Women's Democratic Club. "If, however, the review includes, as it should, contra drug running into Florida and other cities, the results of the investigation could and should be dramatically different." White noted that Oliver North himself advised the Drug Enforcement Administration that cocaine had entered the United States on contra supply planes.

In the end, the *San Jose Mercury News* story is significant not only because it has focused the nation's attention on the CIA's connection to drug traffickers, but because it raises the broader issue of CIA accountability for its actions.

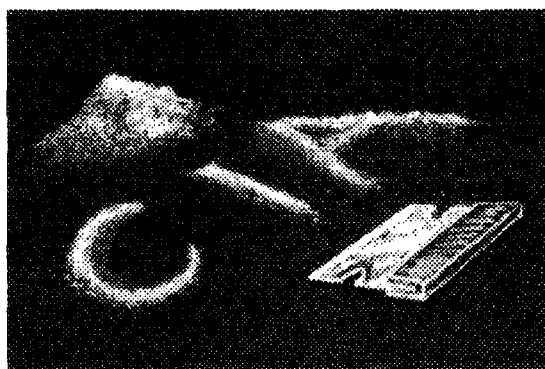
"We must find a way to move intelligence out of a Cold War mode," said former CIA Director Stansfield Turner at a recent Center for International Policy conference. "We are all happy to be living in a more secure world. But we must make our intelligence apparatus both conform with our democracy and respond to our need for reliable intelligence."

Maybe reform will come with President Bill Clinton's appointment of Anthony Lake to head the CIA. Lake's background gives some cause for optimism. In 1971, he resigned from Nixon's National Security Council in protest over the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, provoking the ire of his former boss Henry Kissinger, who had Lake's phone tapped. In the Carter

administration, as head of the State Department's Office of Policy Planning, Lake allied himself with the department's "liberal wing" led by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. Most recently, as Clinton's national security advisor, Lake was the driving force behind the president's Intelligence Oversight Board report on the CIA's connection to human rights abuses in Guatemala (see "Admissions and omissions," July 22).

But let's not overstate the case. Lake, the fifth director of the CIA in as many years, is sure to meet resistance from the agency bureaucracy, particularly the Directorate of Operations (DO), the scandal-ridden branch of the agency responsible for covert actions. DO agents, steeped in a secretive, hierarchical and paramilitary culture, do not easily take orders from outsiders. How hard will Lake be willing or able to push them? A well-placed source, who asked not to be named, said the White House is "petrified" of the CIA. ◀

The Center for International Policy can be reached at 1755 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 232-3317, or at its Web site: <http://www.us.net/cip>.



L A B O R

Slaves of New York

In 1995, New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani launched the country's largest, most ambitious workfare program, designed to move thousands of adult welfare recipients into low-skilled jobs in exchange for their weekly checks. Called the Work Experience Program (WEP), it has injected a total of 100,000 workers into virtually every corner of the municipal labor force over the last two years. Riding the crest of anti-welfare sentiment, Giuliani has garnered accolades aplenty for WEP from the usual suspects. *Newsweek* put Giuliani on the cover of its November 11 issue, heralding him as "the most hated, successful mayor in America" because "crime has plummeted, workfare is working."

*Giuliani's
acclaimed
workfare
program
replaces union
labor with a
new underclass
of welfare
recipients.*

By Annette Fuentes

But WEP is not just a New York story. National attention is fixed on the Big Apple and its workfare scheme as other cities and

states begin to reshape their welfare systems in response to the new federal mandates. Yet despite glowing reviews, the real story of WEP is of hardship, exploitation and unfair labor practices that are roiling unions to their core. "There are other states monitoring us as a role model," says WEP worker Sandra White. "I want to let them know: It's bad. It's not working at all."

A limited form of WEP started during the Dinkins administration, but it took Giuliani to dramatically expand its scope. Thousands of adults between the ages of 18 and 60 who receive public assistance have been forced to "work off" their checks by doing public sector jobs, from street cleaning to tree pruning to clerking in a welfare office. Single parents with kids over 3 years old receive lists of child-care centers (usually full) and are pressed into WEP service. Some 5,000 welfare recipients studying at city universities have been forced to quit school to fulfill WEP assignments, and as many as 10,000 single mothers now at city colleges will be forced

out by WEP by the end of this year, according to the City University of New York's own calculations. Although the WEP law requires that participants be assessed for skills and placed in jobs that provide training that will lead to real work, it rarely happens. The law also gives people the option of education over work, but that provision, too, is routinely violated.

While the ostensible purpose of WEP is to force people on welfare to "give back" something to the city, the unstated and undeniable effect of WEP is to break the back of labor unions. Viewed together with Giuliani's drive to privatize public services, the WEP program is a frontal assault on the most basic tenets of unionism: equal pay for equal work, a safe working environment, and the right to organize.

WEP creates a pool of contingent workers, doing the same work as city employees and often working shoulder to shoulder with them, but for a fraction of their pay. With no sick leave, no vacations, no pensions or other benefits, WEP workers are a constant and not-so-subtle threat by management to workplace standards. "WEP workers are asked to work in conditions that unionized employees negotiated to avoid," says Ed Ott, political director of Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 1180. For example, WEP workers doing street cleaning get no gloves or uniforms or footwear, and have no locker facilities to change clothing so they must go home wearing whatever filth the day brings. In the parks, WEP workers are forced to climb higher than union contracts allow in pruning trees.

How New York's unions approach the workfare issue could determine the face of organized labor for years to come. Is workfare an unmitigated threat that can only weaken unions, or a golden opportunity to bolster their

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diminishing ranks by organizing the most vulnerable and exploited members of society?

"What the unions have done is take a hear-no-evil, see-no-evil approach to workfare," says Stanley Aronowitz, professor of sociology at the CUNY Graduate Center. "It is in their interest to oppose the creation of any job in this city that doesn't pay a decent wage. The second line of defense is to organize WEP workers."

But that hasn't happened. With some exceptions, public sector unions have mostly watched with fear and loathing as WEP workers have begun to fill slots once occupied by their civil-service colleagues. Unions representing workers in private sector jobs, meanwhile, have shown little interest in workfare even though under the new national welfare reform, any state can apply for a waiver to use workfare participants in the private sector. In Alabama, says Ott, some 300 workfare participants are employed in a BMW plant.

WEP workers themselves perhaps hold the key. No matter how the unions or the government see them, if they begin to forge an identity as a class of workers, they could become a force to be reckoned with. Since last summer, WEP Workers Together (WWT), an organization of and for workfare participants, has been agitating and advocating for this growing second-class working class.

"We need our own union," says White, a WWT member. A bank employee for seven years, White, 39, found herself downsized and on welfare when her unemployment

insurance benefits ran out this summer. Assigned to street cleaning, White endures dangerous and unsanitary conditions—and the contempt of regular sanitation employees. The orange safety vests that WEP workers wear are stored in garbage cans, and if they bring a bag lunch it gets tied to the cans' handles for storage. But worst of all, White says, is the "bathroom problem." "I have to go from business to business looking for a toilet," she says. At the sanitation depot in Brooklyn where they meet before being driven by van to work sites, union workers wrote on the bathroom door, "No WEP workers."

Currently 35,000 WEP workers put in a minimum of 20 hours weekly in virtually every city agency, most doing manual labor. About 6,000, the largest group, are deployed in city parks and deserve the credit Giuliani has claimed for parks being their cleanest in years. Sanitation claims a fifth of all WEP workers, who sweep the gutters of busy commercial strips. Another 4,600 work for the city's own welfare agency, the Human Resources Administration, doing maintenance and some clerical work. Public hospitals have 1,000 WEP workers, primarily in housekeeping and dietary jobs.

The other side of the WEP equation—the side Giuliani downplays—is the 22,000 public sector jobs lost through a massive buyout and early retirement program the mayor offered two years ago. The correlation between lost union jobs and the growth in WEP should be obvious to even the casual observer. Hospital Workers Local 420 lost 2,000

Corporate welfare big time

Welfare reform will bring hardship and suffering to all those it touches with one big exception: the data systems companies that score juicy state contracts to process welfare claims.

The social service sector, whose centralized bureaucracies are often seen as inefficient and wasteful, are a ripe target for privatization. Welfare reform, with its emphasis on cost cutting, is spurring many states to farm out the administration of a range of public assistance programs. Wisconsin, Florida and Texas all are experimenting with privatization, with the Lone Star State leading the way with a far-reaching plan to turn its \$8 billion welfare program over to private hands. The prize for the winning bidder is a potential \$2 billion payoff over five years for operating an electronic screening system to determine welfare-applicant eligibility.

In November, Texas opened the bidding on the welfare-administration contract and snared three contenders, including Unisys and Lockheed Martin. With Gerald Miller, a government official who helped draw up the federal welfare reform, now on Lockheed's lobbying team for the Texas contract, the defense contractor giant seems to have the inside track. Although better known for its fighter planes, Lockheed Martin considers welfare services a major growth industry and already has contracts in 30 states to provide some type of public assistance processing. Nationwide, Lockheed processes 10 percent of all child-support payments.

But whichever company wins the bidding in Texas, the sure losers are going to be public service employees who currently process public assistance benefits. As part of its privatization scheme, the state aims to save costs by shutting offices and trimming up to 40 percent of employees now administering welfare benefits. According to the Texas State Employees Union, a CWA local, 17,000 state jobs could be wiped out. —A.F.

members to the buyouts. The parks department lost 2,400 full-time union jobs. American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) local District Council 37, the largest municipal union, lost a total of 11,000 members, according to its president, Stanley Hill.

For Giuliani, the math of WEP workers in city jobs is irresistible. According to Ken Peres, research director for District 1 of CWA, the average clerical worker's salary (not including benefits) costs the city \$12.32 per hour. A WEP worker, meanwhile, costs the city just \$1.80 per hour for a 20-hour workweek. (That's based on a \$577 monthly welfare benefit, one-quarter of which is paid by the city, one-quarter by the state, and half by the federal government.) With cuts in welfare benefits proposed by Gov. George Pataki and the jump to a 30-hour workweek, the cost to the city will be 53 cents per hour for a WEP worker.

Bargain labor doesn't begin to describe it. "It's union busting by management," says Jim Butler, Local 420 president. "It's inhumane. But my position is we can't stop them from coming into the jobs." Then again, Hill and Butler, whose local is under the District Council 37 umbrella, haven't really tried to stop workfare—or to organize WEP workers. Hill, arguably the labor leader with the most clout in the city, has a fairly cozy relationship with City Hall. He negotiated a contract for his 140,000 members that many considered a sell-out; it has a no-layoff provision that the

city can renegotiate any time it chooses. He is loathe to criticize the mayor on WEP even as he acknowledges that the city is violating District Council 37 contracts continually by using WEP workers in civil service jobs.

"We've been able to work with the mayor to create a workfare committee to address our concerns," says Hill. His agenda is to press the city to hire WEP workers into union jobs with full pay and benefits. His achievements to date: 63 WEP workers hired in the public hospitals, and a promise of no displacement for public school maintenance employees and of possible jobs for WEP workers in the school system.

"Hill has taken a position that gives up on a basic principle of trade unionism: Labor cannot be in competition with itself," says Aronowitz. "It's a mistake in judgment to think you can put your finger in the dike, and it will hold forever. A large number of Hill's members will leave the union through attrition, and they will be replaced by the workfare workforce."

Willie James, president of the 31,000-member Transport Workers Union Local 100, has come in for more scathing criticism. He negotiated a controversial contract that flings the door wide open for

WEP to enter the subway and bus systems. With the city threatening 2,000 layoffs, the contract was approved by his members in October by a bare 5 percent margin—with half the members not voting. In exchange for a no-layoff guarantee, James agreed to give up 600 cleaning jobs through attrition and to allow thousands of WEP workers to do the jobs. Numerous attempts to reach James for comment were unsuccessful, but in an October 23 *New York Times* article about the contract, James said, "Under the circumstances, I think we did well."

Not according to New Directions, a powerful dissident faction within Local 100 that vehemently opposed the contract. "We believe it's the wrong thing for a union to agree to downsize itself and bring in a contingent work force," says Tim Schermerhorn, a train operator and New Directions officer. "At bottom it's ideological. You either think unions have to help managers balance their budgets or you enter into a long-term fight. Willie James brags that this agreement is the product of cooperation. That's nothing to brag about."

The new contract has other provisions relating to WEP workers that bode ill for worker solidarity. One is that WEP workers will not be commingled with regular Transit Authority workers. The other gives a \$1.70 per hour raise to any union employee who must supervise WEP workers—"a buyoff to set up some union workers as straw bosses, making money off the backs of welfare

workers," as Aronowitz puts it. Although the new contract is in effect, the mayor's office is still negotiating with the Transit Authority over how many WEP workers the agency will use.

New Directions members are unequivocal in denouncing WEP but have a less clearly articulated position on WEP workers. Their main approach has been a defensive one. "In terms of organizing with these people," says Schermerhorn, "we have that desire but we don't know how the program is going to look when it's instituted." Ultimately, he would like WEP workers to be hired in union jobs with full pay and benefits.

The most progressive stance on WEP comes from the public union least affected so far by the program: CWA Local 1180, which represents white-collar city workers. Local 1180 lost 1,700 workers through the buy-out program, but few WEP workers are qualified for the administrative jobs the union represents. Nonetheless, Local 1180 staff have been backing the efforts of WEP workers to organize themselves, taking a clear stand that they are "working-class people," while also condemning workfare as compulsory labor.

For its aggressive positions on workfare and other issues, Local 1180 has been shunned by Hill and his locals. Nonetheless, Local 1180 initiated a workfare committee on the Municipal Labor Coalition, a citywide organization of all the public employee unions, where it has raised health and safety issues for WEP workers. "We have to come up

with a plan that doesn't undermine standards union workers have fought to gain," says Ott.

Perhaps the greatest scam of WEP, says Ott, is that it's supposed to prepare people for real jobs with real wages and benefits. Yet WEP can't remove the barriers to employment that kept people on public assistance in the first place, like the lack of affordable child care for women and adequate training. "This is a huge piece of the working class that is being brought into the mainstream," says Ott. "Organized labor has a great opportunity to organize them. Whether WEP workers organize independently or with us remains to be seen."

WEP workers certainly are not waiting around for the labor movement to decide whether to embrace them. WEP Workers Together, under the auspices of the Urban Justice Center, an advocacy group, has been pressuring the city to enforce health and safety standards for WEP workers, and to create job training programs and real jobs. They have begun to file complaints with the state Public Employee Safety and Health agency.

"Labor organizes the unorganized or it dies," says Aronowitz. "WEP workers are going to organize with the support of 1180. It will either embarrass and shame District Council 37 and Local 100, or it will cause major conflict among the unions."

Annette Fuentes is editor of *Crítica: A Journal of Puerto Rican Policy and Politics*, published by the New York-based Institute for Puerto Rican Policy.

THE BIG PICTURE

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CITIES

Divorce, California-style

“**T**

here it is, take it.”

So urged engineer William Mulholland in 1913 at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Owens Valley aqueduct, the first large-scale project to bring water to Los Angeles from its California hinterland. Though Mulholland was talking about the water flowing from the new aqueduct, he could just as easily have been referring to the San Fernando Valley, a swath of more than 200 square miles of dusty orchards, farms and empty land that lay just north of Los Angeles across the Santa Monica Mountains.

As Jake Gittes unwittingly discovers in *Chinatown*, the Owens Valley aqueduct was the product of a great land swindle. In the early part of this century, a powerful syndicate bought up much of the San Fernando Valley, then mostly agricultural land, at bargain prices. It then approached the water

board of the City of Los Angeles—on which one of the members of the syndicate, M.E. Sherman, sat—and proposed building a monumental aqueduct from the water-rich Owens Valley to arid Los Angeles. The proposal was put before the voters of Los Angeles (which at the time did not include the San Fernando Valley), who passed a \$25 million bond measure to pay for it. After the aqueduct was built, the syndicate sold their holdings, reaping an estimated profit of \$10 million.

In the same year as Mulholland's famous speech, the Municipal Annexation Commission made it policy that Los Angeles would supply water and power to an outlying area only if it agreed to be annexed to the city. Because Los Angeles controlled the Owens Valley aqueduct, many unincorporated areas voted for annexation after the aqueduct opened. Among these was the arid San Fernando Valley, which agreed to be annexed to the City of Los Angeles in 1915, more than doubling the city's size.

But today, Valley homeowners are seeking to annul this shotgun wedding. The San Fernando Valley secession movement suggests a Big Bang theory for cities. In the early part of this century, Los Angeles, like many urban centers, rapidly expanded, finally stabilizing at about 450 square miles. Now, the city may be on the verge of a dramatic implosion as communities like the San Fernando Valley, San Pedro, Venice, the Westside, and Westchester threaten to splinter off and leave behind a mostly poor, non-white and revenue-strapped Los Angeles.

This implosion, if it happens, will be driven by a long-standing frustration with a stubbornly aloof and unresponsive municipal government. But it will also be driven by a view of cities that has become increasingly popular: that they are not interdependent, interlocking communities, but rather public-sector shopping malls where people ought to get what they pay for. The share of city services an area receives, the argument goes, should correspond to the share of taxes it pays in.

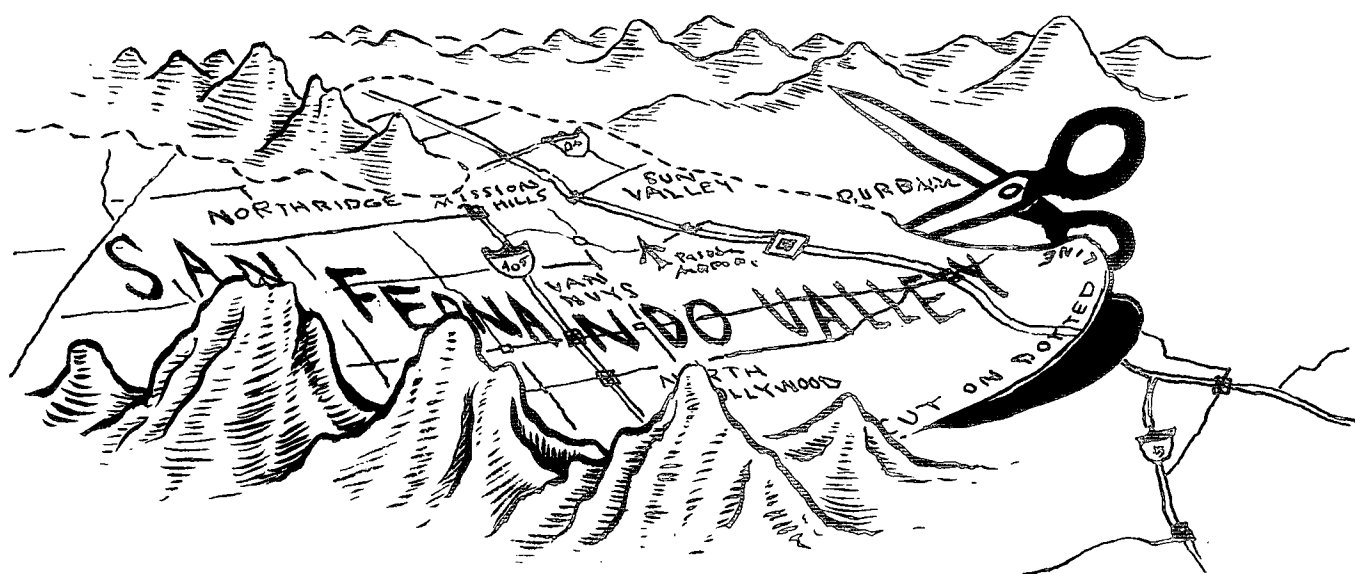
The marriage between the Valley and the city was always an uneasy one. As farms and fruit trees were plowed under to build tract homes and strip malls, the Valley changed from a mostly rural citrus producer to a residential and commercial area. Residents and businesses in the Valley required the same extensive government services as suburban areas everywhere: a fire department, police, sewers, street maintenance and the like. The growing need for government services was coupled in the '70s with a period of high inflation that dramatically drove up house values—and property taxes. As their taxes ballooned, Valley residents began expecting more and more from City Hall. As expectations outstripped city services, Valley frustration mounted.

Growing out of this frustration was the Committee to

*The threatened
secession of the
San Fernando
Valley would
leave behind
a mostly poor,
non-white and
cash-strapped
Los Angeles.*

By Mark Purcell

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Investigate an Independent Valley City/County (CIVICC), led by prominent business people and supported by homeowners and small-business owners. In 1977, CIVICC commissioned a study by a Valley College professor that claimed the San Fernando Valley was paying much more in taxes to the city than it was receiving in services. The CIVICC movement grew and soon hatched an ambitious secession plan. The plan called for the Valley to be annexed to the tiny independent city of San Fernando and then secede, forming its own city. The deal fell apart after a dispute arose over how much of the Valley the city of San Fernando would retain after the separation, but it came close enough to succeeding to elicit a strong response from the City of Los Angeles. In 1977, Mayor Tom Bradley and the City Council recruited state Assemblyman John Knox to push a bill through the state Legislature giving city councils a veto over secession proposals. That veto power, which stands today, is considered by many an insurmountable obstacle to secession.

Republican Assemblywoman Paula Boland, from the Valley community of Granada Hills, authored a bill this year that would have revoked that veto power. The Boland bill sailed through the state Assembly, but was narrowly defeated in the state Senate. However, the successor to Boland's Assembly seat, Republican Tom McClintock, has promised to continue the fight by introducing legislation similar to the Boland bill, all but guaranteeing that another legislative battle over secession will be waged next year.

Many observers dismiss secessionists as political opportunists and the secession movement as a concoction of the Valley's *Daily News*. Those who do so underestimate an experienced and efficient political force: homeowners. If a Boland-like bill becomes law, Valley homeowners, who are well-organized veterans of many political battles, will take a central role in initiating a secession proposal. Leading the

way are the homeowners associations in the affluent hills of the southern Valley: Tarzana, Encino, Woodland Hills, Studio City and Sherman Oaks (ironically, named for M.E. Sherman, who was among those responsible for joining the Valley to Los Angeles in the first place).

Each neighborhood is organized into one, or sometimes two, homeowners associations, which provide the institutional and organizational structure for political action. These associations, each representing some 1,500 households, are organized into larger coalitions such as the Federation of Hillside and Canyon Associations (in the Santa Monica Mountains), the San Fernando Valley Federation (in the flatlands of the Valley) and the Westside Civic Federation (on the Westside of Los Angeles). Most associations have voluntary membership and nominal dues. They serve as a sort of union for homeowners, speaking with a collective voice on issues that concern their membership.

Those issues are not limited to unsightly handbills and skateboarding at the local parking lot. The associations have helped enact important citywide and statewide policies. Homeowners groups were a crucial element in the campaign for Proposition 13, the well-known 1978 initiative that slashed property taxes, resulting in an upward redistribution of income in the state. They were important in "Busstop," the campaign to limit school busing from the inner city to the suburbs. They spearheaded the slow-growth movement of the '80s, which successfully limited the kind and amount of development in affluent areas. They successfully backed "the other Boland bill," which made it easier to divide up the Los Angeles Unified School District. Now, they have turned their attention to secession, creating an organization called Valley Organized Together for Empowerment (Valley VOTE) to lobby for the Boland bill and to support the likely 1997 bill.

The Valley has long been stereotyped as a lily-white bed-

Secession fever

Secession movements have emerged in northwest Washington, D.C., northeast South Carolina, central Florida, St. Louis and even southern Brazil. In each case, wealthier, whiter areas are talking about secession as a remedy for the outflow of revenue to local governments perceived as unresponsive.

In Seattle, for instance, you can hear an eerie redux of the arguments made by San Fernando Valley homeowners. Middle- and upper-income residents of the affluent, mostly white suburb of West Seattle feel they are being neglected by the city government. "We don't see the investment in our area that we see downtown," complains Charlie Chong, a leader of the movement. Secessionists in West Seattle complain they pay more in taxes than they receive in services and worry about development ruining West Seattle's character. In 1994, the city published a land-use plan that would have allowed an increase in low-income housing in West Seattle. Residents threatened to secede, arguing that if they had control over land-use decisions, they would plan for lower density, more libraries and increased police protection.

More famous is Staten Island, where homeowners have sought to give political teeth to their geographical separation from the rest of New York City. The island is 80 percent white, and the median income of islanders is higher than in any other borough in the city. Though all studies have shown that Staten Island pays less in taxes than it receives in services, residents nevertheless feel they are being shortchanged by the city government. Secessionists also worry that the city's urban problems are beginning to spill over onto the island. "The majority of problems on Staten Island are sent here by the city," says Guy Crowl, a Staten Island resident and secession advocate.

In 1993, Staten Island voted to approve a new city charter, and a state-appointed commission has authored a bill that would enact that charter and create an independent Staten Island. The state Legislature, however, ruled that Albany cannot consider a measure that so affects the future of New York City without a request to consider the measure from the mayor and the City Council of New York. The Staten Island case will be fought in the courts for the foreseeable future. —M.P.

room community where the Brady Bunch frolic. Already inaccurate in the '50s and '60s, that stereotype has become even less fitting in the '90s as the Asian and Latino communities in the Valley have expanded. The white population of Los Angeles as a whole has declined from 48.3 percent in 1980 to 37.5 percent in 1990. Over the same period, people with Hispanic surnames in the U.S. Census have shot up from 27.6 percent of the city's population in 1980 to 39.3 percent 10 years later. The Valley has changed in pace with the wider city. The Valley's Latino population has increased dramatically, while its white population has remained relatively constant. The Latino population has grown in the historically Latino Eastern Valley and also has begun to expand westward toward the historically white areas in the Western Valley on the other side of the 405 freeway.

The question of race is inescapably imbricated in the secession issue. Because the Valley is quite diverse ethnically, if the whole area became independent, it would only be slightly whiter than the remaining city. However, if the Valley were split into two cities along the 405 freeway, as in

several plans now being floated, the western city would be considerably whiter than other areas of the former Los Angeles. Critics charge secessionists with racism and with white flight. But secessionists vigorously deny the charge.

Continued on page 36

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Fall from grace

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ntil recently, full employment was the highest priority of Swedish society and of the Social Democrats, who have governed the country alone or in coalition for all but nine years since 1932. On a continent plagued with high unemployment, only 2 percent of Swedes were jobless in 1990. With support that cut across party lines, the government crafted an immensely popular welfare state, dramatically reduced income differences, maintained full employment, and nearly eliminated poverty.

Today, Europe's quintessential welfare state is on the ropes. Nearly 13 percent of Swedish workers are officially unemployed or in government programs for the jobless; about as many are too discouraged to look for work, or are employed part-time for lack of full-time jobs. Unemployment benefits, sick pay, parental

insurance and child and housing allowances have all come under the knife. So have payments to municipalities, which are responsible for child- and elder-care as well as for public assistance. Schools have suffered. And the medical system has undergone draconian cuts, even as patients face higher fees. These cuts started under the previous conservative-led coalition in 1992 and have been continued by the returning Social Democrats.

What happened? According to a well-worn myth perpetuated by the mainstream media, Sweden's welfare state was unsustainable. In a familiar reprise, the *Wall Street Journal* claimed that the conservative-led coalition, elected in 1991, started to slash government expenditures "because the exorbitant cost of the welfare system sent budget deficits soaring." Yet shortly before that, Sweden still had full employment, a strong welfare state and a hefty budget surplus. To understand why Sweden began to hack away at its social safety net, one needs to examine the power of business interests, the pressures of globalization, the implementation of neoliberal policies and the abandonment of the historic commitment to full employment.

Since the '60s, the well-heeled Swedish Employers Association (SAF) has been spending a mint promoting the interests and ideology of business, targeting journalists among others. SAF even manages to get its propaganda into schools by providing them with educational materials. As the composition of Swedish business changed, the line pushed by SAF shifted accordingly. By the '70s, Sweden's export sector had become dominant. Reflecting this internationalization, power within SAF in 1976 shifted to arch-conservative leadership from global-oriented firms. They rejected the Swedish economic model and the capital-labor compromise on which it was based.

Neoliberal ideas, which were spreading worldwide, finally began to penetrate the Social Democratic Party in the '80s. A powerful clique in the Finance Ministry, schooled in neoclassical economics, pushed the ruling party onto a deregulatory path. The government freed financial institutions from domestic credit controls, and eliminated restrictions on the movement of foreign exchange. A sweeping tax "reform," among other things, lowered the top marginal income tax bracket for the well-to-do from 73 to 51 percent. This tax "reform," which had been billed as self-financed, left a big hole in government coffers. Meanwhile, financial deregulation set off a wildly speculative real estate boom fueled by huge bank loans. When the bubble burst, it sparked a near-catastrophic bank crisis. The government rescue squad had to bail out some of Sweden's largest banks, draining the treasury of a sum equal to 4 percent of Sweden's GDP in both 1992 and 1993.

The drive toward European integration propelled the country further in the same direction. In 1990, Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson's Social Democratic government reversed longstanding party policy—and shocked most rank-and-file Social Democrats—by announcing that Sweden would apply for European Union (then European Com-

Entrance in the European Union has increased the pressure on Sweden to dismantle its welfare state.

By Helen Lachs
Ginsburg

munity) membership. Carlsson gave no explanation at the time. But the Swedish budget for 1991-92, released shortly thereafter, explained that "Swedish companies have thrived on intensive foreign competition and are in a good position to use the advantages inherent in greater international integration." In a closely related move, the government then said price stability had replaced full employment as its main economic priority.

A strong desire for acceptance by the inflation-fighting EU heightened the government's determination to bring down inflation in Sweden's booming economy. In the past, Sweden had several ways of curbing inflation without increasing unemployment. Centralized negotiations between business and labor were used to curb wage hikes. Or, by restricting credit to an overheated sector of the economy like housing, the government could use domestic credit controls to slow down economic expansion selectively. This time, however, the Social Democrats jacked up interest rates across the board, throwing the economy into a recession. Unemployment doubled to 3.5 percent, and the Carlsson government got its pink slip in the 1991 elections.

A new conservative-led government performed the coup de grâce. It was as gung-ho as its predecessor about joining the EU and obsessed with fighting inflation that was by then nonexistent. It was even more dogmatic about defending the fixed exchange rate of Sweden's overvalued krona, which was then under speculative attack in global financial markets. Because the government no longer had currency controls, it had to let interest rates skyrocket to stem the outflow of funds. The head of Sweden's Central Bank bragged that the sky would be the limit. The authorities briefly raised the short-term interest rates to 500 percent. In late 1992, the battle was declared lost. The government let the value of the krona be determined by the market and thereby depreciate.

That fiasco and its aftermath converted a recession into a deep depression marked by three years of declining output, the loss of one-tenth of Sweden's jobs and record unemployment. Between 1990 and 1993, a budget surplus of 4 percent of GDP became a 13 percent deficit. This jump was due to the banking bailout, tax reform and mass unemployment,

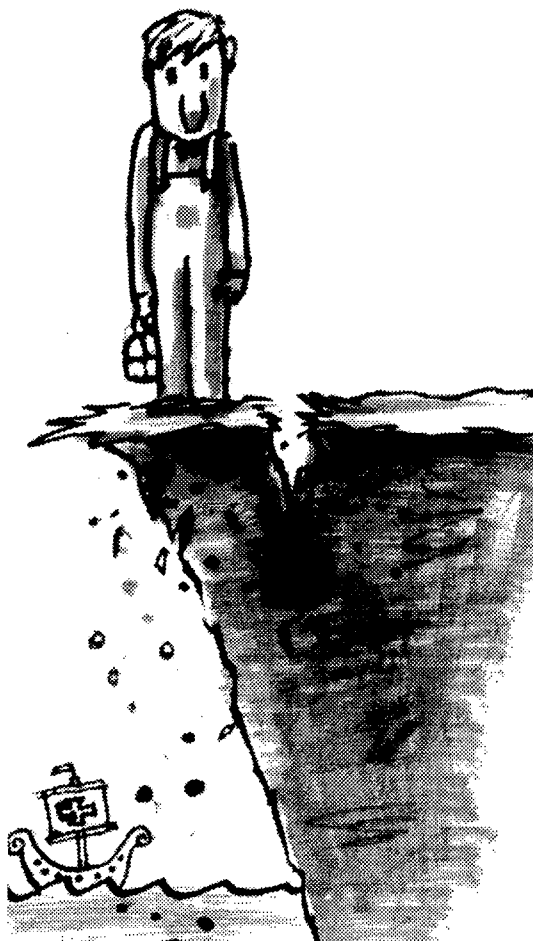
which sharply depressed tax revenues and increased expenditures on the newly jobless.

Exports have boomed since currency depreciation lowered the cost of Swedish goods abroad, but slack demand at home has kept the domestic economy depressed. Yet the Social Democratic government has persisted in deflationary policies, bringing the deficit down to about 4 percent of GDP. Sweden could shrink the deficit without harsh measures if it pursued an expansionary policy of job creation and government stimulus, which would increase tax revenues and curb the need for expenditures on the jobless. Such a program is feasible, especially given that Sweden now has the lowest inflation in Europe. But the government spurns suggestions to change course. In the name of meeting convergence criteria set by the EU, it justifies its assault on the welfare state and its abandonment of an historical commitment to full employment, while insisting that current policies are essential for fighting unemployment. But continued deflationary policies ensure that a new plan to halve unemployment by the year 2000 will fail.

In November 1994, a slim majority of voters approved entrance into the EU. Corporate Sweden—more concentrated, powerful and international than ever—couldn't have been happier. Swedish firms have big investments in the EU, lured by its huge market. Most of Sweden's largest firms are export-oriented transnationals, with the bulk of their sales, assets and work forces abroad. Abetted by currency decontrol, manufacturing jobs declined in Sweden at the same time that Swedish corporations shipped profits abroad, often to gobble up foreign companies.

Big business lavishly financed the pro-EU campaign. SAF even took thousands of teachers on junkets to Brussels to sell them on the virtues of the EU. The pro-EU campaign outspent opponents by a ratio of at least 10-1. All the non-socialist parties endorsed the EU, as did the deeply divided Social Democrats, whose leaders refused to debate the issue in the 1994 elections in which they emerged victorious, held only two months before the EU referendum. The press and even some union leaders supported integration. The main opposition was waged by the dissident "Social Democrats Against the EU," and the small Left (ex-Communist) and Green parties, both of which made gains in the parliamentary election.

Anti-EU Swedes worried about the impact of European integration on the welfare state, the public sector, employment, women's equality, labor rights, the environment,



democracy, neutrality and national autonomy. Pleas from Social Democratic leaders to "trust us" helped tip the scale. So did raw threats from companies that they would abandon Sweden, fears that the country could not go it alone, promises that membership would usher in a golden age of growth and jobs, and hopes that integration would bring peace to Europe. The pro-EU campaign told Swedes that only EU membership could save the welfare state. Finance Minister Göran Persson (prime minister since Carlsson's retirement in March 1996) more bluntly warned that a "no" vote would mean deeper social benefit cuts.

Although financial markets already exerted the same sorts of pressure, entrance into the EU was a watershed that cemented the government's fixation on deficit reduction and continuing cuts. The EU, which has long accepted mass unemployment, requires all member countries to have low deficits, debt and inflation, and stable exchange rates—but not low unemployment. Dashing more than a few hopes, the Social Democrats continued to chisel away at social programs when they resumed power.

Many Swedes now feel they were duped into joining the EU, which has grown enormously unpopular. They point to Norway, which voted against joining the EU despite hearing many of the same arguments. Today Norway has Europe's lowest

unemployment rate, and the economy is booming. Some jobless Swedes are even moving to Norway to find work.

The big issue in Sweden now is whether to take the next step and apply for membership in the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), which has been driving Swedish economic policy for years even though no decision has yet been formally made. The government is resisting mounting calls for a referendum. Admission by the first target date requires meeting stiff criteria, including a deficit no higher than 3 percent of GDP by the end of 1997, which Sweden expects to have. While transnationals applaud the EMU, it is a good recipe for permanent depression. Membership would bring continuous pressure to cut social programs, and would preclude any independent monetary or exchange rate policy geared toward low unemployment.

Anti-EMU sentiment is riding high. A poll released in November shows only 26 percent of Swedes favor joining. As the Social Democrats veer to the right, their support has fallen from 45 percent in the 1994 election to 30 percent today. The winners are the Greens and, especially, the Left Party. Their combined support has doubled from 11 to 23 percent. Women, in particular, have been switching to the Left Party, which is ideologically close to where the Social

Continued on page 36

Swedish women in retreat

Sweden ranks number one on the United Nations index of gender equality. Women, unfortunately, are also high on the list of losers in the downsizing of Sweden's welfare state, as their major gains have been tied to its growth.

For Swedish women, paid employment is the bottom line in the quest for equality. Close to 75 percent of women work—even mothers of young children—though 40 percent do so part-time. Swedish women have used their political clout to create a welfare state that aims to make work and family compatible, to involve fathers in child care and to insure an adequate income for families. This has been accomplished through policies such as subsidized child care, child and housing allowances, paid parental leave to care for a newborn child (which fathers are encouraged to use) and paid days off to care for a sick child.

With the public sector taking a beating, so are women, who make up 80 percent of the municipal and county council work forces. Under mounting pressure from within the Social Democratic Party, the unions and demonstrations, Stockholm has just agreed to provide enough funds to local governments to avert additional layoffs but not to restore jobs. Though the women's unemployment rate is still slightly lower than the men's, there is also a vast pool of female part-timers who want full-time work. Partial jobless benefits to supplement their earnings have become harder to get.

Unions have emphasized raising the income of low-wage workers, so the gender pay gap is smaller in Sweden than in the United States. But it is widening. Among full-time workers, women earn 80 percent as much as men—down from 87 percent in 1980.

High unemployment and shrinking social benefits are eroding the security that women formerly enjoyed. Services that enable mothers—especially single moms—to work are under siege. With local governments hard-pressed for funds, Sweden's renowned child care centers "solve" the problem with higher fees, larger groups of children, reduced staff training and declining quality. One way women are responding is by having fewer children; Sweden's formerly high fertility rate has plummeted in recent years.

Paradoxically, though women are losing out economically, their political representation is higher than ever. Forty-one percent of parliament members today are women, up from a 70-year low of 33 percent in the preceding conservative regime. The increase occurred mainly because the Social Democrats, alarmed by the threat of a women's group to form a political party, ran a 50-percent-female slate.

Women will undoubtedly play a leading role in the struggle to rebuild Sweden's welfare state. An unemployed mother of four from a small town launched a protest movement in October that is picking up steam. She has planned and spoken at demonstrations, and inspires others to do the same. Already described by Sweden's leading newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, as a symbol of popular revolt, Therese Rajaniemi, and others like her, might yet save Sweden's welfare state. —H.L.G.

B L A C K A M E R I C A

My own private Alcatraz

T

he loss of inner-city jobs and the errant logic of the drug war have spawned an incarceration epidemic that is crippling African-American communities—and fueling a corrections industry that uses black youth as its main raw material. “While arrests and convictions are steadily on the rise, profits are to be made—profits from crime. Get in on the ground floor of this booming industry now!” blared a brochure for a “Privatizing Corrections Facilities” conference held this month in Dallas. “Firms which provide management of correctional facilities are booming with investment opportunities,” the brochure disclosed. “Revenues and earnings have grown substantially already between 1994 and 1995, and are expected to jump even higher during the next few years.”

There are now 1.6 mil-

Exploding prison populations are a tragedy for the black community but a cash cow for American business.

By Salim Muwakkil

lion people behind bars in the United States—triple the number there were 16 years ago. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, during the 12 months that ended June 30, 1995, the number of prison inmates grew by 89,707, the largest annual increase in U.S. history. According to a 1995 study by the Washington-based Sentencing Project, African-Americans are the predominant and fastest growing inmate population. Blacks comprise about 12.5 percent of the U.S. population, but make up about 50 percent of the inmate population.

While most prisons are still owned and operated by the government, private corporations are getting into the act. Several dozen companies now build or operate jails on behalf of the government. The largest players are Wackenhut Corrections Corporation and Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), which are under contract to run 93 minimum- and medium-security facilities with more than 60,000 beds. Wackenhut earned a spot last year among *Forbes* magazine’s

“200 Best Small Companies” after registering a decade of steady growth.

The growing profitability of the field is enticing many other corporations, including construction giant Bechtel Corp., but analysts see no sign of a glut in the near future. According to an article by Randy Gragg in the August 1996 issue of *Harper’s Magazine*, by the end of 1994, 13 states had private prisons; by the end of 1997, 102 private prisons will be in operation.

Private prisons are not a new phenomenon. In fact, they were common in the United States in the second half of the 19th century and the early part of this century. They were finally outlawed in 1925 after a rash of newspaper stories detailed prisoners being malnourished, brutally beaten and overworked, and after labor and business groups complained of unfair competition.

Private prisons came back on the scene in 1984, when the federal government contracted with CCA to operate an immigration detention center in Houston. Not surprisingly, private prisons and detention centers today are facing the same sort of charges as they did 70 years ago. In June 1995, for example, a facility run by Esmor Correctional Services Corporation was closed down after undocumented immigrants rioted. An INS report on the incident concluded that Esmor had skimmed on food, repairs and guard salaries in order to generate greater profits.

Corporate interest in prisons extends beyond ownership and management of facilities. Some firms reap fortunes providing laundry, food and other services. Long-distance phone carriers, for example, are making aggressive pitches to prisons to carry their pay phones. Prisoners must phone collect, a service for which companies charge substantially higher

rates. A single prison phone can gross \$15,000 per year—five times more than a phone booth on the street. In return, the prisons receive kickbacks in the form of commissions.

Federal and state prisons now employ inmates to produce goods for sale. From 1980 to 1994, the number of inmates employed in prison industries jumped 358 percent, while the number of federal and state prisoners increased by only 221 percent, reports the Correctional Industries Association. These prisoners make products from paint brushes to prescription eyewear to Patriot missile parts, all for a fraction of what workers get paid on the outside.

Since 1990, 30 states have made it legal to contract out prison labor to private companies. Prison industries' sales rose from \$393 million in 1980 to \$1.81 billion in 1995, according to a spokesperson at the Justice Department. In Arizona, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reports, 10 percent of all inmates work for private companies, making less than minimum wage. Some prisoners in that state test blood for major medical firms, and others raise hogs for John's Meats. In New Mexico, prisoners take hotel reservations by phone. In Ohio, inmates do data entry. Prisoners in Ohio used to make Honda parts as well, until political pressure from labor unions forced an end to that particular arrangement. Oregon prisoners sew jeans called "Prison Blues." And Spalding golfballs are packed by imprisoned labor in Hawaii.

The Wackenhut facility in Lockhart, Texas, has taken prison labor to a new level of sophistication. A 1995 article by Reese Erlich in *Covert Action Quarterly* described how Lockhart Technologies, Inc.—one of the three private companies doing business at the prison—received an entirely new facility from Wackenhut built to specifications for prison labor. The company, which assembles and repairs circuit boards for corporations like IBM and Texas Instruments, pays only \$1 a year in rent and gets a tax abatement from the city. Lockhart closed its circuit board assembly plant in Austin, laid off 150 workers and moved all the equipment to the Wackenhut facility, where the company pays prisoners minimum wage. The prison takes about 80 percent of inmate wages for room and board, victim restitution and other fees.

The United States is building prisons at an unprecedented rate—123 state and federal prisons opened or were under

construction in 1996 alone. The cost of constructing enough cells just to keep up with the inmate increase is estimated to be more than \$6 billion a year, according to a 1995 report by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 600,000 full-time employees worked in corrections in 1995, more than in any Fortune 500 company except General Motors.

Over the past five years, Texas' prison population has increased from 30,000 to 127,000. The state, which has the nation's highest incarceration rate, houses its overflow in county jails. Florida, another state heavily involved in prison construction, now has 67,000 prison beds, but will add 18,000 more over the next three years. State officials warn that new sentencing guidelines will require 58,000 additional beds over the next decade to house the new inmate influx.

California, with the nation's largest prison population (135,000), now spends more public funds on corrections than on higher education. The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, a San Francisco-based public policy group, found that 9.4 percent of the state's general fund went to corrections, while higher education got 8.7 percent. This is a dramatic shift in spending priorities from 1980, when 9.2 percent of the fund was devoted to higher education and only 2.3 percent went to prisons.

The center's report, entitled "From Classrooms to Cell-blocks: The Effects of Prison Building on Higher Education and African-American Enrollment," found that California's prisons now have twice as many blacks as its four-year public universities. At the same time, the report noted, rising tuition fees are putting higher education out of reach of many Californians, especially African-Americans. "Since 1980, California has made policy and fiscal decisions that increasingly favor locking people up rather than providing them with higher education," the report concluded.

The cost of corrections, including state, local and federal budgets, ran to more than \$30 billion a year in 1994. New prison spending—at a time of general budget austerity—is a clear indication of government priorities. Most troubling of all, the profits of this burgeoning industry are made off the backs of African-Americans.



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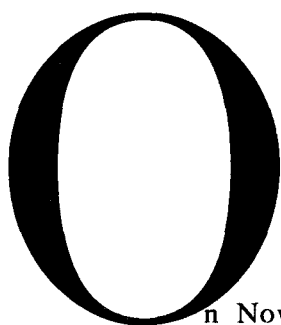
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CAMBODIA

Peace without justice



*Will
justice for
Cambodia's
killers be
sacrificed in
the name of
peace?*

By Adam Fifield

In November 29, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague sentenced Drazen Erdemovic, a Bosnian Croat, to 10 years in prison for his role in the mass slaughter of Bosnian Muslims last year. In October, a high court in Italy detained and readied for trial former SS Captain Erich Priebke for his part in one of the worst wartime atrocities in Italy in 1944.

In August, Cambodia's nominal monarch, King Sihanouk, pardoned Khmer Rouge Foreign Minister Ieng Sary, a man far more odious than Erdemovic or Priebke.

After Ieng—once known as Pol Pot's Brother No. 2—and some 3,000 guerrillas broke from the Khmer Rouge last summer, a debate in Cambodia ensued: Should Ieng and his conveniently converted cohorts be held responsible in the name of justice, or should they be pardoned

and welcomed back into Cambodian society in the name of peace and reconciliation? In the end, Ieng was spared the death sentence, which a Cambodian court had imposed on him in absentia in 1979 for his part in the murder of up to 2 million people in Cambodia in the late '70s. He is now exempt from state prosecution.

The Cambodian government not only opted to pardon some of the Khmer Rouge regime's most pernicious characters but may offer them government posts. Even more bizarre, former Communist Hun Sen, one of Ieng's most bitter enemies, hailed Ieng as a patriot. Hun Sen runs the Cambodian government in a contentious power-sharing relationship with Sihanouk's son Prince Ranariddh, and each scrambled to cut a deal with Ieng shortly after he defected. The rivals strove not only to obtain credit for brokering peace, but also to gain a share of Ieng's coveted rebel military power in northwest Cambodia.

For most Americans, the Khmer Rouge's murderous regime is merely a footnote to the Vietnam War. Over the past 15 years, Cambodia's killing fields nightmare has been quietly subsumed into a cloudy gestalt of Third World conflicts, saved from complete obscurity thanks in large part to Roland Joffé's 1984 film *The Killing Fields*. Human rights advocates and many survivors of Pol Pot's terror now fear that the crimes of the Khmer Rouge—and the chance for justice in Cambodia—may be ebbing away.

The Cambodian holocaust of 1975-79, during which Pol Pot and his cadres tried to impose agrarian Maoism, claimed the lives of a quarter of Cambodia's population through execution, slavery, starvation and disease. The mass extermination ended when Vietnam invaded and toppled the Khmer Rouge in 1979, installing a puppet government composed largely of Khmer Rouge defectors led by Hun Sen. Ever since, however, the rebel Maoists have continued to wage a low-level guerrilla war against the government, abducting and killing peasants and even tourists in the regions they still control.

Although it was far better than Pol Pot's reign of terror, Hun Sen's government fostered corruption and developed dictatorial tendencies of its own. In 1989, Vietnam officially withdrew from Cambodia, but Hun Sen and his power structure remained.

After he lost to Ranariddh in U.N.-monitored elections in 1993, Hun Sen and troops loyal to him threatened civil war, eventually forcing Ranariddh to recognize him as an equal partner in a dual prime-ministership. Hun Sen and his ministers soon dominated the government and overshadowed Ranariddh. The schizophrenic government is now riddled with corruption and patronage, with Hun Sen extorting and dispensing favors according to his whim. The



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**Skulls from a killing field
near Siem Reap.**

country's court system has been eroded by corruption and lack of standards.

To make matters worse, the Khmer Rouge appears poised, after a series of make-overs, to slip inconspicuously back into the political process. Last March, before the defections, Khmer Rouge party president Khieu Samphan announced that the Khmer Rouge may take part in the upcoming 1998 elections, and Ieng recently founded his own political party. While a rehabilitated Khmer Rouge may not present the danger it once did, many Cambodians fear that its crimes will be erased from the historical record. In Cambodia today, students are taught nothing of the Khmer Rouge's crimes. In 1991, when the Khmer Rouge, along with other Cambodian factions, signed a peace accord in Paris, the Cambodian government expunged references to the killing fields from textbooks in deference to the peace process.

Following Ieng's amnesty, the *New York Times* reported that most Cambodians were willing to let bygones be

bygones in the interest of peace. But Jason Abrams, co-author of a report commissioned by the State Department to analyze options for justice in Cambodia, says that based on his own conversations with Cambodians, such assumptions are not that simple. "The mantra you get is 'We want peace. We want peace,' " he says. "But when you dig deeper and ask if they want to see Pol Pot and Ieng Sary become part of the government, they say, 'No, we want them in jail. We want them dead.' "

The Cambodian Genocide Program (CGP), a two-year fact-finding project funded by a \$500,000 grant from the U.S. State Department, will release a report on the Internet this month containing "the most comprehensive collection of information on the Cambodian Genocide," according to program director Ben Kiernan. Information in the report (Web site: <http://www.pactok.net.au>) will include a biographical database of thousands of Khmer Rouge leaders and victims, 6,000 photographs, a map of mass grave locations and a bibliographical database.

The CGP started with optimism that the evidence it gathered would be used for prosecutions against the Khmer

Rouge leadership. "By the end of 1996," a September 1995 progress report predicted, "when the CGP's mandate will expire, an international Cambodian genocide tribunal may have already commenced functioning." But with the program's funding due to expire this month, the prospect of an international—or any other—tribunal seems remote. The program's work, while historically significant, could merely become a token academic gesture, if its mandate is not extended or its information is not acted upon. (Kiernan is hoping for a continuation of the funding and is appealing to other sources for money.) Experts on Cambodia hope that once it's released, the CGP material will serve as a catalyst for justice. Without a concerted international campaign, however, that is unlikely.

The State Department agreed to fund the CGP only after Sen. Charles Robb (D-VA) drafted the Cambodian Genocide Justice Act in May 1994. The act created the CGP, provided for its funding and established its mandate: to assemble the documentation, legal expertise and evidence to prosecute the crimes of the Khmer Rouge. CGP Program Manager Craig Etecheson—who with his research teams discovered thousands of new mass graves in Cambodia this summer—says that for years the State Department resisted the drive to prosecute Khmer Rouge perpetrators in order to avoid shedding light on its covert support for Pol Pot's guerrilla war against Vietnam. "They actively blocked prosecution between 1979 and 1986, because the United States was, at the time, the Khmer Rouge's most important military ally," he says. "They blocked it in the late '80s, because they were embarrassed about the early '80s."

Robb acknowledges that the State Department resisted his 1994 legislation. He vows to make every effort to involve the U.S. government in bringing the Khmer Rouge to justice, and says he is merely awaiting the release of the CGP's report before considering further action. He warns, however, that it will be difficult to gain congressional support for any formal resolution. Robb himself points out that when he sponsored the Cambodian Genocide Justice Act in 1994, he didn't have much support, despite the fact that his party held a majority. Now that he is in the minority, it seems even less likely that he will be able to goad Congress to act. "If we don't have the official imprimatur of the government of Cambodia," he says, "it's going to be difficult."

Any form of accountability will require a tremendous amount of international political will, says Dianne Orentlicher, professor of international law at American University and director of the university's War Crimes Research Office. "King Sihanouk said the amnesty [he granted to Ieng and others] will not prevent an international criminal tribunal from punishing them," she says. "What he's saying, in effect, is that his country is in a straitjacket and that the rest of the world ought to be helping them. It requires moral leadership. Somebody has to take the lead."

Since the Cambodian government seems unlikely to pursue justice, human rights advocates and diplomats are con-

sidering other options. The United Nations, which oversaw the 1993 elections in Cambodia, could create a tribunal similar to those for Bosnia and Rwanda. But as Orentlicher points out, the war crimes tribunals in both of these countries were created as "peace enforcement measures." Because the Khmer Rouge was reduced to a relatively minor threat more than 15 years ago, the Cambodian situation lacks the urgency that resulted in the creation of tribunals in Bosnia and Rwanda. And given the failure of these tribunals to apprehend such culprits as Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic in Bosnia, the prospects for an effective international tribunal in Cambodia seem slim.

Some observers have called for the establishment of a truth commission, like the Sábato commission in Argentina, which would wield investigative and documentary, but not prosecutorial, powers. The amnesty granted to Ieng and others by Sihanouk could prevent their prosecution by the state, but it would not preclude the documentary activities of a truth commission. And as Cambodia scholar Steven Ratner notes, "a truth commission can serve as a prelude to a prosecutorial process." A Cambodian truth commission could be modeled after the one established in South Africa, which determined that if a defendant did not confess, he or she could then be prosecuted. This way, leaders like Ieng, who has refused to confess to his part in the Khmer Rouge atrocities, would be forced to do so. Many observers say that Cambodia will only mount a truth commission if the United States applies pressure, but the only way the United States is likely to act is if Congress forces it to do so. In November, the Senate passed a resolution, sponsored by Sen. William Roth (R-DE), affirming the Senate's commitment to justice in Cambodia. While it is non-binding, "it has put the administration on notice," says Roth aide Dan Bob.

What if, in the end, nothing is done? "I think it will set a very discouraging precedent that political reconciliation overrides and is not consistent with justice," says Ratner. "I think reconciliation goes hand-in-hand with justice."

The failure to hold the Khmer Rouge accountable could have grave ramifications for justice across the globe. "If these aren't crimes," says Orentlicher, "it's hard to say there is such a thing as an international crime." ◀

Adam Fiffeld is a freelance writer based in New York.

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I N T H E A R T S

Neither-nor satire

Citizen Ruth
*cleverly
 mocks both
 sides of
 the abortion
 debate, but
 does it stake
 out a position
 of its own?*

By Pat Dowell

If I were a pro-lifer (which is about as likely as Pat Buchanan signing on as editorial writer for *ITT*), I'd feel my side had gotten the short end of a very sharp stick in *Citizen Ruth*. Most people who've seen this cheeky little satire seem to feel it targets both sides of the abortion rights debate, never dropping its hip comic insouciance. It's true that the movie makes fun of both positions' excesses, but its satire is much sharper and more intricate when it's at the expense of the all-American, hymn-singing zealots known as the Baby Savers than when it targets hapless but well-meaning pro-choicers.

The movie follows the fortunes of Ruth (Laura Dern), a scruffy ne'er-do-well whose addiction to paint fumes and other noxious vapors is briefly interrupted by arrest. When it's discovered she's pregnant, she's charged with endangering the life of her fetus, but the judge offers to

reduce the charges against her if she agrees to an abortion (four previous children were taken by the state). Ruth is delighted until her jailhouse encounter with pro-life activists incarcerated for protesting too close to the local abortion provider. They see Ruth's story as an outrage and a public relations opportunity. One of them takes Ruth home to a humble outpost of constrained American comforts.

"We don't really sit in those chairs," explains Gail as she scoops Ruth up out of the Early American living room. Gamely dining al fresco despite their location in an airport flight path, the family consumes meat in vast quantities. It's a home where prayer is bountiful, while communication between wife and husband, not to mention mother and sullen headbanger daughter, is kept to a minimum. Soon, however, the local pro-choice brigade is also at work, leaving Ruth no less bewildered. Life does seem less desperate on the other side, where the movie pokes gentler fun at the

foibles of feminists who sing songs to the moon and consort with the clinic security providers, who can be found in their off-hours at the local flesh emporium.

One of many surprising things about *Citizen Ruth* is the star quotient of its cast, which features not only Dern, a once-promising actress sidelined by such monstrous Hollywood piffle as *Jurassic Park*, but such movie, stage and television stalwarts as Kurtwood Smith and Mary Kay Place, playing the Savers who take in Ruth; Swoosie Kurtz as an undercover pro-choice activist; and even Burt Reynolds, as the televangelist head of the Baby Savers. Director and co-screenwriter Alexander Payne must have some talent to keep this cast on its toes and to pry such a sly, underplayed performance out of Reynolds, who has been hamming it up mercilessly on his comeback trail (see *Striptease* and wince).

Reynolds comes into the story when both sides finally grasp the opportunity Ruth represents for their movements. The Baby Savers call a national alert, and the pro-choice side responds in kind. So does local television, of course, and as things escalate, Ruth is buffeted from one opinion to another. "I slept in some dumpsters. Maybe I slept on some babies," she wails after watching a helpful video about "the American holocaust."

Ruth likes the attention—the warmth of a surrogate family and the eventual offers of



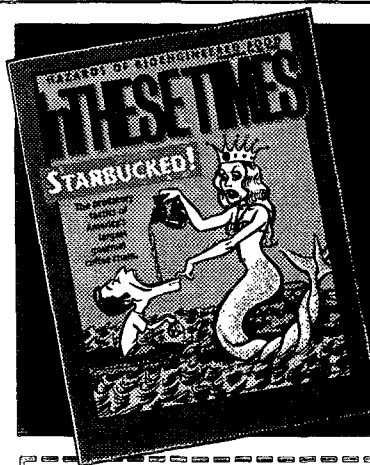
Citizen Ruth
 Directed by
 Alexander Payne

money from both sides—but she never grasps the principles involved. But then, the principles are somewhat lost on the activists, too, suggests the screenplay. They are so caught up in the trappings of their causes, both the concrete accessories and the rigidly abstract ideas, that the object of their passion, Ruth herself, matters less and less as the fight heats up.

Citizen Ruth has a point. The movie is not simply mocking the various lifestyles on both sides of the abortion rights issue—though it does that with cleverness and abandon—but also lampooning a deeper fact about the American approach to ideas: For many people, politics is a lifestyle choice at least as much as it is a commitment to a cause. Political commitment is often inextricably wrapped up with picking out hairstyles, clothes, bric-a-brac, vacation spots, and, of course, friends (although probably not quite as often or as thoroughly as the makers of *Citizen Ruth* would have us believe). In the movie, when a pro-choice undercover agent sheds her pro-life disguise, it means emerging from a hairstyle she doesn't like, losing those square (in both senses of the word) eyeglasses, and even changing the tone of her voice, her phrasing and her vocabulary. Ruth is the only fit character to lead us on a guided tour of both sides because she belongs to neither, and both of them have difficulty making her their champion once they discover she doesn't quite match their idea of a suitable symbol. In the end, Ruth escapes precisely because she becomes dimly aware of her own distinct identity through the activists' relentless attempts to mold her to theirs.

Ruth herself becomes all but invisible to those who take her up as a cause. So consumed are her would-be protectors with each other that in their final confrontation over Ruth, she is able to sneak out of the clinic and walk, undetected, right past them. She has a bag full of cash and a consciousness that has taken a small step forward—if not toward forming a political or moral opinion about abortion, then at least toward realizing that she has a choice about something in her life. The struggle over her exploitation as a political symbol finally has given Ruth a desire to make a decision for herself, even if it's just to get hold of tape two in a get-rich-quick audio course in real estate.

For all its cleverness in pointing out the mote that distorts the vision of American activists, however, *Citizen Ruth* displays a rather large beam in its own eagle eye of satire. The search for the absurdities and contradictions in political movements is often nothing more than the excavation of excuses for not taking any cause seriously. If the groups supporting various issues suffer from impurities of motive and internal contradictions, this line of thinking goes, why bother with any of them? This convenient cynicism of our times, which applies made-for-TV movie simplicity to the messy complications of real life, is just as much a part of the consumer culture as defining politics by its shopping opportunities. After all, this is a cynicism with a dollar value. No commitment is the most cost-effective of ideological investments: It frees one for more rewarding pursuits, including the pursuit of a career in Hollywood.



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IN PRINT

Granny bashing

By Dean Baker

Peter Peterson's new book poses the question, "Will America grow up before it grows old?" A better question would be whether it will grow senile. Peterson, who served as secretary of commerce during the Nixon administration, wants to gut Social Security and Medicare, two highly popular and efficient programs that have provided tens of millions of people with a modicum of security in their retirement years. To win support for his agenda, he has published yet another book (his third on the topic) arguing that these programs will bankrupt the nation. The basic story is that the retirement of the baby boom generation will create an unbearable burden on younger workers. He musters a considerable quantity of data to make his case, much of it in impressive color charts. The story he tells is quite scary. Fortunately, it is also not true.

If there are any claims in Peterson's book that are not outright false or seriously misleading, I was unable to find them. Let's start at the beginning. In his first footnote, Peterson describes the intermediate projections of the Social Security Administration (SSA), which are the standard basis of policy analysis for Social Security, as "a fiscally optimistic scenario that assumes modest gains in longevity, buoyant fertility rates, and high levels of net immigration." He then adds that he occasionally uses the administration's "high-cost" scenario to determine what the future will look like if this "optimism proves unfounded."

The SSA's projections cover the next 75 years; by law, the program is required to be "actuarially sound" over that period. These forecasts depend on a host of economic and demographic assumptions, but as far as the long-term viability of the system is concerned, the most important are the growth rates of the population and the economy. For the former, the "buoyant fertility rates" assumed by the SSA average 1.94 over the 75-year period. This is below the current rate of 2.06, and considerably below the 2.46 average of the last 55 years. The "high level of net

immigration" assumed in the projection is 900,000 per year (legal and undocumented immigrants combined), below many estimates of the current level of immigration. Neither the SSA nor Peterson explains why they expect immigration to actually shrink relative to the size of the population.

The SSA's intermediate scenario also assumes that economic growth will be slower over the next 75 years than in any previous period in the history of the nation. The average annual growth rate projected over this period is 1.49 percent. By comparison, the average annual growth rate over the last 75 years was approximately 3.5 percent. If Peterson were trying to present an honest case, in addition to including the "high-cost" scenario (with an average annual growth rate of 0.8 percent), he would have included the SSA's "low-cost" scenario. This set of projections shows the Social Security Fund running a surplus indefinitely, with no change in taxes or benefits whatsoever. But honest discussion is not Peterson's agenda.

His agenda is fairly straightforward: Cut benefits and raise taxes. For Social Security, he proposes raising the retirement age from 65 to 70 by 2015, means-testing benefits and reducing the cost-of-living adjustment. The increase in the retirement age would hit hardest those at physically demanding jobs, who would find it difficult to work through their late 60s. Means-testing sounds progressive—only those below a certain income would be eligible for benefits—but it is a recipe for undermining political support for the program. Means-tested programs, like welfare, soon become identified with the poor, and hence have always been easy political targets. The reduction in the annual cost-of-living adjustment would cause Social Security income to decline each year of a person's retirement. This is certainly a perverse social policy.

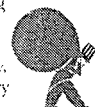
Peterson probably didn't bother to check, but taken together his cuts would create a situation in which projected Social Security taxes exceed projected benefits. This means that we would be deducting a "Social Security" tax from people's paychecks in order to pay for the military or the interest on the government bonds that Peterson owns.

If honesty is not a concern for Peterson, neither is logic. Peterson justifies his call for reducing the annual cost-of-living adjustment by citing evi-

PETER G. PETERSON WILL AMERICA GROW UP BEFORE IT GROWS OLD?

"Peterson is a moderately New Right conservative. He is not a radical, and he does not believe in radical change. But he is a conservative, and he is a conservative in the worst sense of the word." —WILLIAM BURNETT

How the Coming
Social Security
Crisis Threatens
You, Your Family,
and Your Country



**Will America Grow Up
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How the Coming Social
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Your Country**
By Peter G. Peterson
Random House
237 pp., \$21



dence that the standard measure of consumer inflation, the consumer price index (CPI), overstates the true increase in the cost of living. The evidence on this point is questionable, but its logical implications are not. Since the CPI is used to convert money income to real income, a lower CPI means faster growth of real income. If the CPI overstates the yearly increase in the cost of living by "as much as 1 to 2 percent," then the projections of improvements in living standards must be raised by exactly as much. This means that the average real wage in 2030 will be at least twice as high as it is today, and possibly more than three times as high. In other words, if Peterson believes his claims about the CPI, then he must believe that future generations will be rich and not unbearably burdened—and there was no reason for him to write his book. Ah, logic can be cruel.

It is tempting to pull more factoids out of Peterson's book and hold them up to ridicule, but let's keep one thing clear: Peterson is no crackpot. As founder of the Concord Coalition and a ubiquitous presence on the lecture, talk-show and op-ed page circuit, he's as responsible as anyone for the gloom-and-doom tone of current discussions on Social Security. His book is blurbled by Sens. Paul Tsongas and Warren Rudman, George Shultz, former Fed chairman Paul Volcker, Diane Sawyer and Warren Buffet. His arguments may be foolish and wrong, but they're far from inconsequential. And there's a whole chorus backing him up—indeed, you'd be hard pressed to make it through an issue of *Business Week* or an afternoon of CNN without learning that Social Security and Medicare are sure to have collapsed by the time today's 30-year-olds retire. So rather than just make fun of his book, it's worth rebutting it.

Peterson has three big ideas: He thinks that an aging population will require Social Security taxes to be raised to impossible levels to maintain current benefits. He likewise thinks Medicare, which also serves the elderly, will become exceedingly costly. Finally, in general, he thinks the benefits received by greedy retirees are a serious threat to the incomes of working Americans. Let's examine these claims one by one.

As far as Social Security is concerned, the latest trustees' report shows that the fund could be kept solvent for 75 years with a tax increase equal to 2.2 percent of the covered payroll. Measured as a share of GDP, this would be a tax increase of approximately 0.9 percentage points. By comparison, the increase in military spending in the buildup from 1977 to 1987 was 1.3 percent of GDP. So the required tax increase might be a burden, but hardly an impossible one.

Alternatively, since it would not be desirable to raise Social Security taxes by 2.2 percentage points tomorrow, the fund could be kept in balance by raising the tax at the rate of 0.1 percentage points a year (0.05 each on the employer and the employee) from 2010 through 2048. Using the intermediate projections from the SSA, I have calculated that this would allow after-tax wages to grow

an average of 0.9 percent a year. By the end of this period, wages after Social Security taxes would be more than 60 percent higher than they are today. There are other ways to keep the Social Security Fund solvent as well; the point is, it can be done easily without lowering the living standards of future generations.

When Peterson and his ilk refer to the explosive growth of entitlement spending, they are really talking about the growth of Medicare and Medicaid spending. Measured as a share of GDP, Social Security is projected to rise by 1.9 percentage points, from 4.8 percent to 6.7 percent, between 1995 and 2030. Over this same period, Medicare and Medicaid spending as a share of GDP is projected to rise from 3.6 percent to 10.4 percent. This sort of increase in costs would indeed be a serious burden. However, what Peterson ignores is that these growth projections are derived simply by assuming that health spending in the public sector will be a certain percentage of that in the private sector. Thus the same Health Care Financing Administration projections that show Medicare and Medicaid spending tripling by the year 2030 show that in the same year the average health care costs for a family of four will exceed 90 percent of the median family's before-tax income. If health care costs really match these projections then we will be facing an economic collapse early in the next century even if Medicare and Medicaid are eliminated altogether.

If Peterson really has the interest of our children at heart, why isn't he leading the drive for comprehensive health care reform? He does note the possibility, but dismisses it as being politically unobtainable at present. Of course, slashing Medicare and Social Security aren't terribly viable political policies just yet either, but Peterson is apparently more willing to take a long view when attacking the benefits of the elderly than when the profits of the insurance industry are at stake.

If health care costs (both private and public sector) are brought under control, there is no reason why future generations should not on average enjoy substantially higher living standards than we do at present. "On average" is an important qualification. Although average living standards have risen over the last 15 years by about 1 percent per year, most workers have suffered declining real wages. The median male worker (a worker in the middle of the wage distribution) saw his real wages decline by 14.9 percent from 1979 to 1995. (Wages for female workers rose by 4 percent over this period, but from a considerably lower base. Since 1989, the median wage for women has been falling also.) The main factor that has depressed the income of young workers in the recent past—and threatens them in the future—is not the benefits received by their parents and grandparents, but the upward redistribution of income to people like Peter Peterson. The losses that workers have seen due to growing inequality dwarf the tax burdens that they face from the aging of the population. Peterson might be willing to give up his Social Security check, but he's not

willing to give up all his stock market and interest earnings of the last 15 years. The policies that brought about this massive upward redistribution are not discussed anywhere in Peterson's book.

Peterson may qualify as king of the granny bashers, but the competition is stiff. A whole industry has sprung up in the last few years, churning out schemes to privatize Social Security. Actually, the proposals being put forward should more accurately be called "government-mandated savings," since they propose having the government force individuals to place savings in private markets. A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* described how the financial industry, led by pension company State Street Boston and the like, is spending millions of dollars on think-tanks and public policy forums to lay the intellectual foundations for privatization. State Street Boston execs Marshall Carter and William Shipman have even penned their own blueprint for a mandated savings plan, *Promises to Keep*.

The big selling point for mandated savings is, of course, the high returns that can be expected from money invested in the stock market. Carter and Shipman are particularly shameless in this regard, suggesting annual returns of 10.5 percent or even 12.5 percent. It is true that we can all get rich with such returns, but it is also true that such returns are literally impossible. Remember, the reason Social Security is supposed to be in trouble in the first place is that future economic growth is projected to be much slower than past economic growth, which means that returns in the stock market will be much lower in the future than in the past (cruel logic again).

The return on stocks is comprised of two parts: the annual dividend payout and capital gains (the increase in the stock's price). Currently, dividend payouts for stocks average about 2.8 percent of their price, a third or less of the total return. The rest of the return is made up of capital gains. Anyone who can predict with certainty what the stock market will do next week, month or year will be very rich. I can't do that, but I can say with certainty that there are things it won't do. If profits grow at the same rate as the overall economy, to generate a 7 percent real return would require the ratio of the price of an average share of stock to its earnings to hit 34-1 by 2015. This compares to its current level of 20-1, a record high. For 7 percent returns to continue for the full 75-year period, the price-to-earnings ratio would have to rise to 79-1 by 2035, and to 485-1 by 2070. I feel confident in asserting that such ratios are impossible.

Alternatively, profits could rise as a share of the GDP. This would require the share of wages to fall. For a sustained 7 percent return, wages would have to decline by 12 percent, compared with the projected levels in the trustees' report, by 2015. By 2035, the necessary decline in wages would be 37.4 percent, and by 2070, it would be 138.8 percent. I think this, too, can be safely ruled out.

The bottom line is that there is no pot of gold waiting for

people in the stock market. But brokerage firms will do quite well if the government forces people to place trillions of dollars under their control. People who hold mutual funds currently pay about 1.5 percent per year in brokerage fees. With the additional regulation the new, mandated accounts would require, that percentage would likely grow. This means tens of billions of dollars in fees every year for the financial industry. With such stakes we can expect to see many more books on America's demographic crisis and the need for radical Social Security reform.

The fact is, Social Security and Medicare are remarkably successful programs. They provide benefits for everyone, hence their popularity, but they don't make anyone rich. They are incredibly efficient compared to the private sector alternatives. The expenses of private sector insurers (both life and health) are between 25 and 30 percent of benefits. Administrative costs are 0.8 percent of benefits for Social Security and 1.7 percent for Medicare. These programs should provide models for other social programs, such as universal health care coverage or child care.

Anti-government ideologues see in the current high tide of anti-government sentiment an opportunity to destroy these two programs and thereby dig the welfare state out by its roots. Peter Peterson's warnings of fiscal and generational doom provide them, and the Wall Street money grubbers drooling over the prospect of getting their hands on Social Security contributions, with their most respectable cover. Pessimism almost always comes across as responsible. But what's the point of our economy if, instead of enjoying steadily increasing incomes and leisure, each generation has to give up the benefits painfully won by the last? If progressives can resist the siren song of responsibility and unapologetically defend Medicare and Social Security from this onslaught, it will be a victory to be proud of. ◀

Dean Baker is an economist at the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. His weekly press commentary, "Reading Between the Lines," (co-authored by Jared Bernstein) can be found at EPI's Web site: <http://epi.org/epi>.

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The homeowners associations argue that the city government is too large and inefficient to be responsive to their needs. Each Los Angeles City Council member represents about 250,000 people (by comparison, each council member in New York represents roughly half that many), and each county supervisor has about 1,800,000 constituents. Valley residents complain of the City Council's neglect and arrogant indifference, and of their lack of local control. In particular, they criticize the city government for devoting attention and money to downtown Los Angeles, the inner city and Hollywood while ignoring the Valley.

Linked to the feeling of being ignored is the pervasive sense that the city is somehow cheating the Valley. "We feel shortchanged," says Don Schultz, president of the Van Nuys Homeowners Association. "We don't get the services we feel we should based on the taxes that we pay into the system. I think most people here feel disenfranchised with the City of Los Angeles." A recent article in the *Daily News* fanned the flames. The piece claimed that the Valley did not get its "fair share" from the city because, according to the paper's calculations, the Valley pays 31.5 percent of the city's taxes and receives only 29.8 percent of its services. "For many years the people of the Valley believed they were being shortchanged," a press release from Valley VOTE trumpeted. "Now we have the evidence."

City Council member Hal Berson, who was a leader in the CIVICC movement as a businessman and now represents the Northeast Valley, thinks the Los Angeles City Council clings to the veto because they don't want to lose the Valley cash cow. "If you're taking advantage of somebody, and taking three dollars from them and giving them back one dollar in services," he says, "I think you can understand why the city is afraid the Valley will leave." Valley residents complain that they are unfairly expected to subsidize the needs of other parts of the city. "It's like the farmer who grows all the food, and all the neighbors come and take it, and he starves to death," says Gordon Murley, president of the Woodland Hills Homeowners Association, summing up Valley residents' frustration.

Critics charge secessionists with trying to take the money and run, of wanting to flee—rather than help solve—the urban problems on the other side of the hill. At stake is the notion of what it means to be part of an urban community. If a city is organized according to the principle that each area must fund its own needs and pay in taxes what it draws out, then the gulf between poorer and richer neighborhoods in our nation's cities will inevitably widen. Secession is the logical conclusion of that guiding idea. Will Valley residents abandon the city, leaving a Balkanized and poorer Los Angeles in their wake? Only the future will tell. And that future, as always in Los Angeles, will be upon us sooner than we expect. ◀

Mark Purcell is a Ph.D. candidate in geography at the University of California-Los Angeles.

Continued from page 23

Democrats once were.

Within the Social Democratic Party, the chasm is wider than ever. The "traditionalists" are wedded to egalitarian values, but power is in the hands of those calling themselves the "renewers," led by Prime Minister Persson, who are tearing down the welfare state and accept the agenda of business.

Historically, the Social Democratic Party and the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), the blue-collar workers confederation, have been considered branches of one tree—the labor movement. Tensions between them have been mounting for some time, as have rifts within the LO. At its September Congress, a major attempt by one wing of the LO to cut ties with the Social Democrats failed. LO leaders urged members to regain influence by becoming more active in local branches of the party. Meanwhile, LO continues to provide the Social Democrats with substantial funds, though some union locals, including the Transport and Retail Workers, recently took the unprecedented step of cutting their contributions to the Social Democrats by as much as half. While a symbolic gesture at this point, if the practice spreads, it could have real repercussions for the party.

In contrast with France and Germany, where workers have taken to the streets when the government threatened to reduce their benefits, Sweden has remained surprisingly subdued. Much dissatisfaction, however, has been expressed in tensions within unions and within the Social Democratic Party, and by attrition from the Social Democrats. Weak leadership, LO's ties to the Social Democrats, a belief among some that nothing can be done, and a tradition of working things out through cooperation and consensus have kept Swedes from taking more overt action. Protest, however, is not contrary to Swedish tradition. The general strike was used in the struggle for the right to vote in 1902; more recently, a strong popular movement in the late '70s forced a shift in nuclear policy. Since October, rank-and-file and other grass-roots protests seem to be spreading. There have been large demonstrations in Stockholm, Gothenberg, Borås and Gävle. A worried Persson already has postponed implementation of new rules restricting unemployment benefits.

If the government continues along the same path, high unemployment will become permanent in Sweden, as it is elsewhere in the EU, and social and economic cleavages will widen further. Only a strong mass movement can force a real change in course. Even in a globalized economy, there are alternatives. ▶

Helen Lachs Ginsburg, professor emerita of economics at Brooklyn College, is co-author of *Jobs For All: A Plan For The Revitalization of America* (Apex); author of *Full Employment and Public Policy: The United States and Sweden* (Lexington Books); and co-founder of the National Jobs for All Coalition. She wishes to thank Al Burke for his help with this article.

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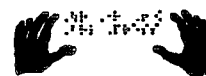
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Continued from page 40

same obligation to enlighten the public on every possible topic. Read a Gelernter art review, and you will inevitably be perplexed by irrelevant mentions of gender roles, the *New York Times* (responsible for much of our decline) or even "child abuse witch hunts." But taken together, his writing on the most diverse topics—computers, art, gender, religion—has one unifying theme, which he reiterates with Randian single-mindedness: We should turn back the clock and undo what he calls (in a *City Journal* essay) our "slow death between 1939 and today."

In the introduction to his 1995 book *1939: The Lost World of the Fair*, Gelernter writes: "We remember our best citizens. We mourn their deaths and celebrate their achievements. I don't know why we should not mourn and celebrate our best eras the same way. Consider, then, the tail end of the 1930s." This elegiac statement sets the tone for all of his writing, which is uniformly witty, elegant and premised on an absurd romance with a chimerical past.

The past had so much we lack, like domesticated mothers. Gelernter writes in *Commentary* that feminists have forced mothers out of the home against their will, leaving their children in lonely, unsupervised misery. If that's so, why not have a father stay home, say, or each parent do half time? Because, Gelernter says, quoting Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, mothers are more "bound" to their children. In his *National Review* critique of the recent Vermeer show at the National Gallery, he offers this piece of his mind: "There is an unchanging psychological reality beneath the *Sturm und Drang* of evolving sex roles; women were the lacemakers in the 17th century, still are (to the extent that people still make lace), and will be in 2300 too."

A discerning psychologist, Gelernter is an even subtler architecture critic. His main insight is that we have long overlooked two key structures built, of course, in 1939. He writes in the *Weekly Standard* that the Guggenheim's Abstraction exhibit should have included a picture of "Wallace Harrison's Trylon and Perisphere ... at the center of the 1939 New York World's Fair." Same magazine, four weeks later: "lost landmark ... the Trylon and Perisphere at the 1939 World's Fair." A character in 1939 is "looking around ... turning frequently to his left to take in the Trylon and Perisphere."

Gelernter is a literary critic, too. Reviewing Norman Mailer's biography of Picasso for the *National Review*, he concludes that the book is good, except for one minor flaw: Mailer does not write very well. No matter. "Good writing takes enormous energy, and if no one cares (one can imagine Mailer reasoning, perhaps subconsciously), why bother?" His apologia for a writer whose recent work has been notoriously slack (the first sentence of *Harlot's Ghost* contains a misplaced modifier) says more about him than about Mailer. Even a poorly edited book from a once-august writer is blamed on the sinister tide of decline.

Gelernter is hardly alone in his preoccupations. A further reading list in nostalgic utopianism might begin with Wendy Shalit's *Commentary* article, "A Ladies' Room of

One's Own," about the sad demise of single-sex college bathrooms. At Williams College, she discovered "the permanent advent of co-ed bathrooms" to be the bane of her existence. Not only did they force her to decamp every morning for the administration building, where she could shower and brush her teeth in a bathroom marked "Women," they also somehow converged with multicultural curricula, sensitivity training and, naturally, the sociology department to fracture the integrity of the modern campus and destroy the "mystique between men and women." How the proto-feminist essay by Virginia Woolf (definitely not part of the canon in the days of single-sex bathrooms) connects with her thesis remains unclear.

The nostalgic utopian reading list would next mention David T. Beito's dirge, in the *National Review*, for the days before the welfare state, when fraternal societies—the Knights of Pythias, the Sons of Italy, the Polish National Alliance, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows—took care of the poor's medical needs. The Knights and Daughters of Tabor in Mississippi, for example, ran a hospital that served thousands of black sharecroppers from 1942 to 1964. "Like most black hospitals, it was a low-tech enterprise which would probably run afoul of current certifications standards. Given the great poverty of the members, however, it represented a major achievement."

Beito's love for the past is so uncritical and unreflective that he can celebrate, without a trace of irony, the days when impoverished blacks were denied access to all public health resources and had to cobble together a rudimentary health care system that would fall short of the most minimal standards today. Who needs standards? The hospital staff "showed a missionary zeal which made up for many technical shortcomings." Charles Murray, meet Mary Baker Eddy. At least the Christian Scientists admit to running on faith.

The list of ahistorical, poorly considered nostalgic utopian writings is, sadly, much longer. But abundance can't make up for the fact that history is no friend to nostalgia. There are too many women, blacks, homosexuals, Jews—all people for whom the good old days weren't always good.

David Gelernter at least recognizes the Achilles' heel of his philosophy. "We don't want to give up the tremendous legal progress we've made; for example, bigotry is illegal today and socially unacceptable. Nor do we want to give up our economic growth," he told the *Yale Free Press*. Yet nowhere does he engage the vexing questions that plague his retro-romance: For instance, might not the capitalist growth that he cherishes be close cousin to the moral decay that he decries? The streets were once safer, and maybe people were more civil, but we gain no useful insight into how or why from the utopians' brightly-colored cartoons.

The nostalgic utopians ought to abandon art criticism, psychology and economics, and stick to subjects they know. Gelernter has written that he would have become a writer, but chose computer science "because of the Talmudic injunction to learn a useful trade." Wise men, those rabbis. ◀

Mark Oppenheimer works in the Washington bureau of the *New Yorker*.

I N T H E E N D

Looking backward

By Mark Oppenheimer

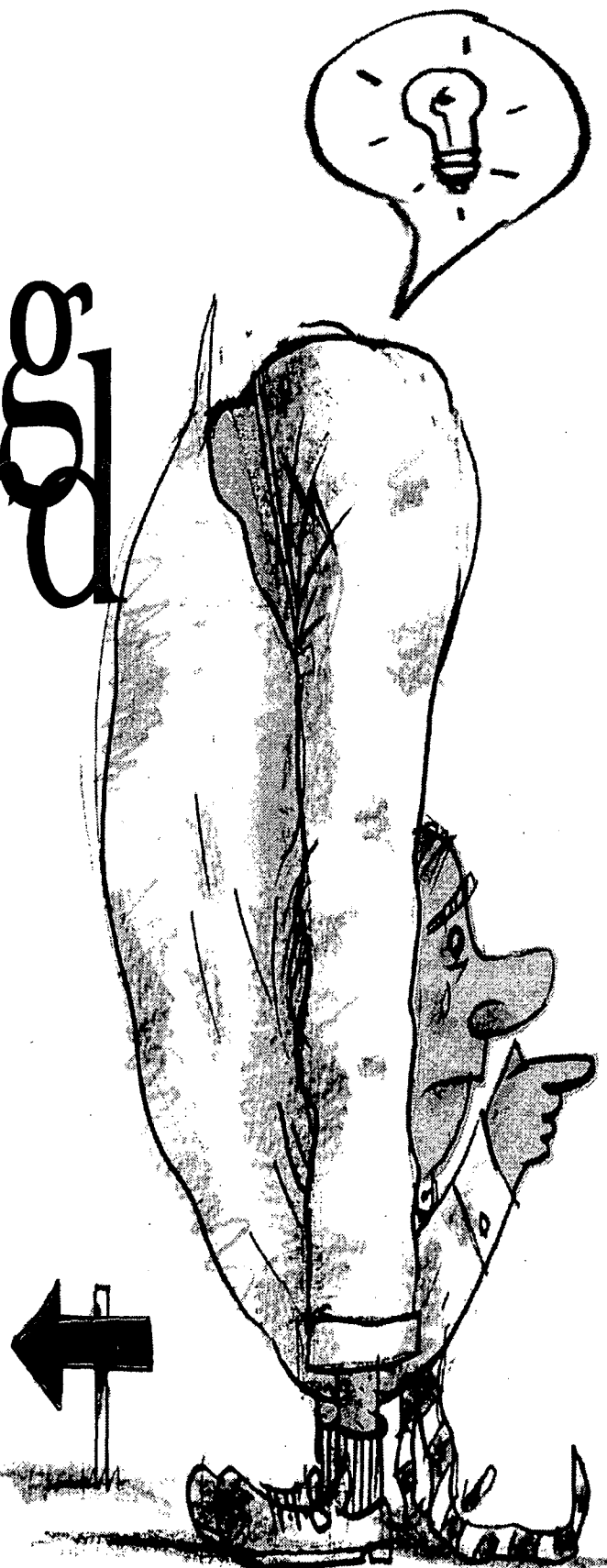
Given his widely reported brilliance, it would make sense to credit Theodore Kaczynski with a depraved sense of irony. But if it was indeed he who sent the package to Prospect Street in New Haven—the package that destroyed David Gelernter's right hand—the alleged Unabomber probably just neglected to do his homework. If the Luddite terrorist meant to strike fear into the hearts of the on-line people, he could not have chosen a worse target. For Gelernter is not only ever wary of the future—he has a positive dislike for the present.

David Gelernter, a professor of computer science at Yale University, has emerged as a prolific advocate of a particular kind of cultural conservatism; call it nostalgian utopianism. "It seems to me that romanticizing the past today is an act of rebellion," Gelernter told the *Yale Free Press* last year. "We're not Marxists hypothesizing a utopia that has never existed. We're utopians talking about a state of affairs that used to hold."

Gelernter believes in a perfect world, but locates it in the past, not in the future. He can even pinpoint the year of its greatest efflorescence. As art critic for the *Weekly Standard*, contributing editor at the *National Review* and occasional writer for *Commentary*, he has produced a corpus of writings in service to the idea that feminists and student radicals, in collusion with feckless establishmentarians, have in 57 years brought a once-ideal nation to its knees. Every piece he writes is ultimately an anthem to the past and an indictment of its despoilers. We might call this his Blue Period.

As a public intellectual, David Gelernter is something like Ayn Rand without the acolytes. Like Rand, he has hopelessly selfish politics that do not stop at the political, and he feels the

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